

The
**RED CROSS
GIRLS**
with the
**RUSSIAN
ARMY**



VANDERCOOK



The
RED CROSS GIRLS
with the
RUSSIAN ARMY

MARGARET VANDERCOOK



The Project Gutenberg eBook of The Red Cross Girls with the Russian Army

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: The Red Cross Girls with the Russian Army

Author: Margaret Vandercook

Release date: July 18, 2007 [eBook #22095]

Most recently updated: January 2, 2021

Language: English

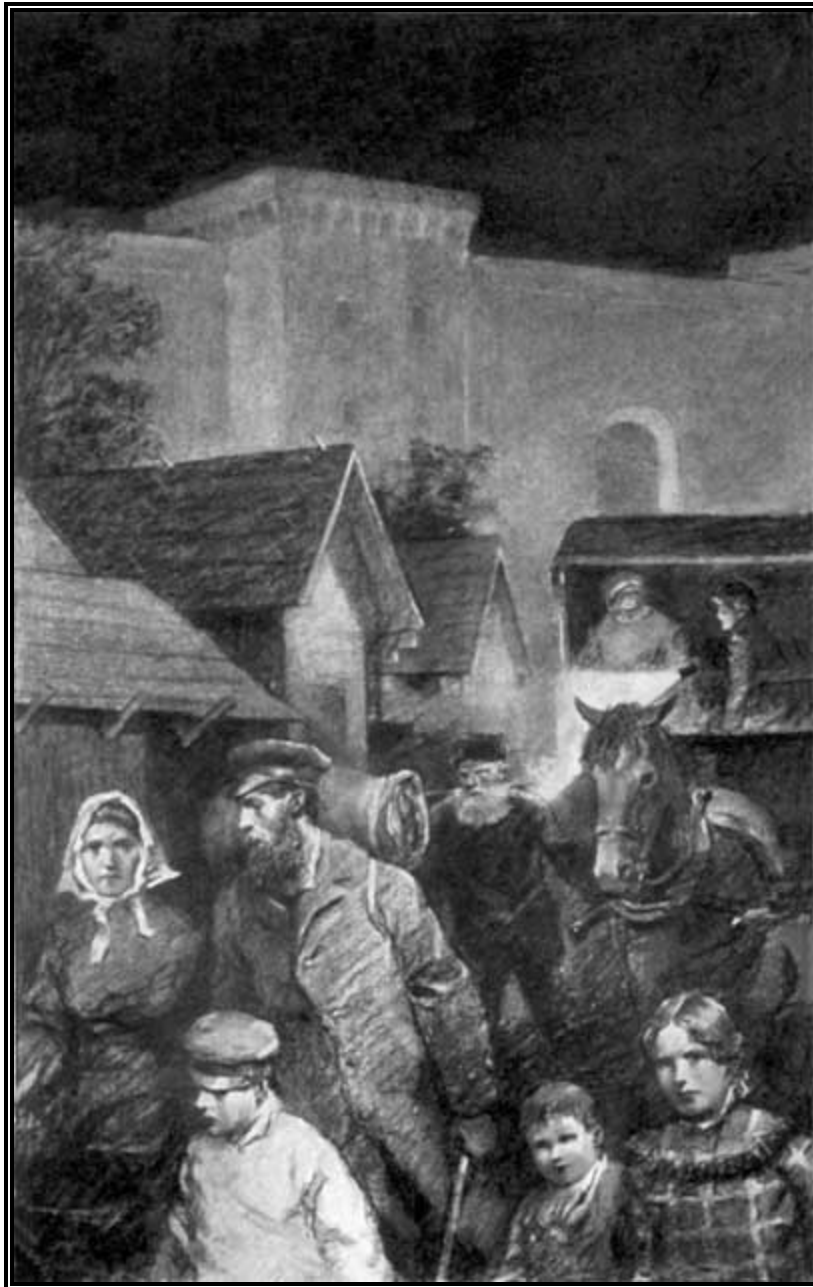
Other information and formats: www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/22095

Credits: Produced by Mark C. Orton, Linda McKeown, Jacqueline Jeremy
and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at
<https://www.pgdp.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE RED CROSS GIRLS WITH THE RUSSIAN ARMY ***

THE RED CROSS GIRLS WITH THE RUSSIAN ARMY





BARBARA PRESENTED HIM WITH THE ELECTRIC LAMP.
(*SEE PAGE 150.*)

The Red Cross Girls
with the Russian Army

By

MARGARET VANDERCOOK

Author of "The Ranch Girls Series," "Stories
about Camp Fire Girls Series," etc.

Illustrated

The John C. Winston Company

Philadelphia

Copyright, 1916, by
THE JOHN C. WINSTON CO.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	A PEASANT'S HUT IN RUSSIA	7
II.	A FORMER ACQUAINTANCE	23
III.	GENERAL ALEXIS	37
IV.	AN ENCOUNTER	53
V.	OUT OF THE PAST	67
VI.	THE ARREST	80
VII.	A RUSSIAN CHURCH	92
VIII.	ANOTHER WARNING	104
IX.	THE ATTACK	118
X.	MILDRED'S OPPORTUNITY	134
XI.	A RUSSIAN RETREAT	148
XII.	PETROGRAD	158
XIII.	THE NEXT STEP	174
XIV.	MILDRED'S RETURN	191

XV.	THE WINTER PALACE	206
XVI.	THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS	217
XVII.	THE DEPARTURE	236
XVIII.	A POEM AND A CONVERSATION	247
XIX.	THE REUNION	256

THE RED CROSS GIRLS WITH THE RUSSIAN ARMY

CHAPTER I

A Peasant's Hut in Russia

IN the last volume of the Red Cross series the four American girls spent six months in tragic little Belgium. There, in an American hospital in Brussels, devoted to the care, not of wounded soldiers, but of ill Belgians, three of the girls lived and worked.

But Eugenia went alone to dwell in a house in the woods because the cry of the children in Belgium made the strongest appeal to her. The house was a lonely one, supposed to be haunted, yet in spite of this Eugenia moved in. There the money of the girl whom her friend had once believed “poor as a church mouse” fed and cared for her quickly acquired family.

In Eugenia's haunted house were other sojourners furnishing the mystery of this story and endangering her liberty, almost her life. They were a Belgian officer and his family whom the Red Cross girl kept in hiding. Somehow the officer had managed to return to his own country from the fighting line in Belgium. After securing the papers he desired from the enemy, by Eugenia's aid, he was enabled to return once more to King Albert and the Allied armies. Thus Eugenia was left alone to bear the brunt of the German displeasure after the discovery of her misdeeds. She was

imprisoned in Brussels, and became dangerously ill. Finally, because she was an American, Eugenia was made to leave the country, rather than to suffer the punishment which would have been hers had she belonged to another nationality.

But the four American Red Cross girls also had the companionship of Dick Thornton during their stay in the once lovely capital of Belgium.

Dick had not recovered the use of his arm, but in spite of this had come to Brussels to help with the work of the American Relief society.

Here his once friendly relation with Barbara Meade no longer existed. Because of her change of attitude he apparently grew more attached to Nona Davis.

However, at the close of the story, when Barbara is taking Eugenia back to southern France, she and Dick unexpectedly meet aboard a fog-bound ship. And in the darkness the light finally shines when Dick and Barbara discover at last that their feeling for each other is stronger than friendship.

Later, near “the pool of truth” not far from the “Farmhouse with the Blue Front Door,” Eugenia Peabody again meets Captain Henri Castaigne, the young French officer whom she had once nursed back to health. A short time afterwards he and Eugenia are married.

Later the three other American Red Cross girls decide to continue their nursing of the wounded soldiers of the Allied armies in far-off Russia.

One cold October afternoon three American girls were standing in the stone courtyard of a great Russian fortress near the border line of Poland.

Situated upon a cone-shaped hill, the fort itself had been built like the three sides of a square, with the yard as the center. Along the fourth side ran a cement wall with a single iron gate.

Evidently the three girls were engaged in Red Cross work, for they wore the familiar service uniforms. One of them had on a heavy coat and cap, but the other two must have just come out of doors for a few moments.

Indeed, their first words revealed this fact.

“I really don’t feel that you should be starting upon this expedition alone, Nona,” Mildred Thornton argued. She was a tall girl, with heavy, flaxen hair and quiet, steel-gray eyes. She was gazing anxiously about her, for Russia was a new and strange world to the three American Red Cross nurses, who had arrived at their present headquarters only a few weeks before.

Nearly a year had passed since the four friends separated in Belgium. Then Mildred and Nona Davis had remained at their posts to care for the homeless Belgian children, while Barbara Meade and Eugenia Peabody returned to southern France.

Now at the close of Mildred Thornton’s speech to Nona, Barbara Meade frowned. She was poised on one foot as if expecting to flee at any moment.

“I quite agree with you, Mildred,” she protested. “Nona’s message was far too mysterious and vague to consider answering. We must not forget that we are now in a country and among a people whom we don’t understand in the least. Besides, I promised both Dick and Eugenia that we would be more careful. How I wish one or the other of them were here to advise us!”

Shivering, Barbara, who was the youngest and smallest of the girls, slipped her arm through Mildred's.

A few yards before them sentries were marching slowly up and down, with their rifles resting on their shoulders, while a double row guarded a single wide gate. Every now and then a common soldier passed on his way to the performance of some special duty. Gray and colorless, the afternoon had a peculiar dampness as if the wind had blown across acres of melting snow.

Nevertheless in reply to her friends' objections Nona Davis shook her head.

"Yes, I realize you may both be right, and yet so urgent was my message that I feel compelled to do what was asked of me. But don't worry about me, I have the letter with the directions safe in my pocket. Good-by."

Then before either of the other girls could find time to argue the point a second time, the young southern girl had kissed each of them and turned away. Later they saw her give the password at the gate and the sentry allow her to pass out.

Before her lay a stretch of sparsely settled country divided by a wide and much traveled road. Several miles further along a wide river crossed the land, but near at hand there were only small farms and meagre clumps of pine woods.

After a few more words of disapproval, Barbara Meade shrugged her shoulders, and then she and Mildred re-entered the small curved doorway of the Russian fort. The left wing was being used as a hospital for the

wounded, while the rest of the great fortification was crowded with officers and soldiers.

These men were being held in reserve to await the threatened invasion of the oncoming German hosts. Warsaw had fallen and one by one the ancient Russian fortifications once deemed invincible had given way before the German guns. But here at Grovno, under the command of the great General Alexis, the Russians were to make a final stand.

However, without thinking of anything save personal matters, Nona Davis first set out along the main traveled road. Now and then she was compelled to step aside to let a great ox cart go past; these carts were filled with provisions being brought into the fort. Occasionally a covered car rattled past loaded with munitions of war, or a heavy piece of artillery drawn on low trucks. But one would like to have seen a far greater quantity of supplies of all kinds being brought to the old fortress. It was an open secret that the supply of munitions was not what it should be, and yet Grovno was expected to withstand all attacks.

But the young American girl was not reflecting upon the uncertainties of war during her walk. Neither did she feel any nervousness because of the newness of her surroundings, for the country in the rear of the fortifications was chiefly inhabited by Russian women and children and a few old men.

Nona walked on quickly and with a speed and careless grace that covered the ground without apparent effort.

She was looking extremely well, but above all other things Nona Davis appeared supremely interested. For some reason, still unknown to her, she had been more stirred and excited by the coming into Russia than any country she had yet seen. She both admired and feared the Russian people,

with their curious combination of poetry and stupidity, of dullness and passion. Before returning to her own land she meant to try and understand them better. For somewhere she had read that the future art of the world was to come forth from Russia. It is the Slavic temperament and not the Anglo-Saxon that best expresses itself in music and literature.

Nona's errand this afternoon was a curious and puzzling one, fraught with unnecessary mystery.

Four days before, a Russian boy about twelve years old had appeared at the gate of the fortress at Grovno, bearing a note addressed to Miss Nona Davis. Oddly enough, although the note was written in perfect English, it was not signed. In spite of this it requested that the American girl come to a small house about a mile and a half away to see a former friend.

But who the friend could be, not one of the three girls could imagine. Yet they scarcely talked of anything else. Nona had no acquaintances in Russia save the people she had met in connection with her work, and there was no one in her past whom she could possibly conceive of having come into Russia as a tourist at such a time.

Therefore it was Mildred Thornton's and Barbara Meade's opinion that Nona should pay not the slightest heed to such a communication. Anonymous letters lead to nothing but evil. But in spite of their objections, here at the first possible opportunity Nona was obeying the behest. Probably she could not have explained why, for she was too sensible not to appreciate that possible discomfort and even danger might lie ahead of her. Perhaps as much as anything she was actuated by a spirit of sheer adventure.

So it is little wonder that during her walk Nona's thoughts were now and then engaged with her own affairs. Yet after a little her attention

wandered from the immediate future and she fell to recalling the history of the past years' experiences, her own and her three friends.

No wonder Barbara was often lonely and homesick for Dick Thornton.

She had become engaged to him on the fog-bound trip she had made with him in getting Eugenia safely out of Belgium. Remembering Eugenia's escape, Nona said a short prayer of thankfulness. After her hiding of the Belgian officer and his family from the German authorities, she would never have been allowed to leave Belgium unpunished had she not been an American woman. Remembering the fate of the English girl who had committed the same crime, Nona appreciated how much they had to be thankful for.

And now Eugenia was married to Captain Castaigne, the young French officer. Curious that among the four of them who had come from the United States to do Red Cross work among the Allies, Eugenia should be the first to marry! She, a New England old maid, disapproving of matrimony and, above all, of international marriages!

Yet the wedding had taken place in the previous spring at the little French "Farmhouse with the Blue Front Door," where the four girls had spent the most cheerful months since their arrival in Europe for the war nursing.

Only once had Nona and Mildred deserted their posts in Belgium, where they had continued Eugenia's work of caring for the homeless Belgian children. Then they had gone to attend her wedding, but had returned to Belgium as soon as possible.

But Eugenia and Captain Castaigne had taken scarcely more time for their own honeymoon.

Soon after the ceremony Captain Castaigne had gone to rejoin his regiment and three days after Eugenia had become a member of the staff of a French hospital near her husband's line of trenches.

So it turned out that Barbara Meade was left at the Chateau d'Amélie, as Madame Castaigne's friend and companion. Dick Thornton boarded in the village near by, so that he and Barbara had a number of happy months together.

But Dick had finally decided that he must return to America and had urged Barbara and his sister Mildred to return with him. Of course, Nona had been invited to accompany them, but no special pressure had been brought upon her.

However, Mildred did not feel that her Red Cross work in Europe was finished, while Barbara refused to desert her friends.

But Barbara had another reason for her decision: she desired Dick to be alone when he confessed their engagement to his mother and father. Barbara had little fear of Judge Thornton's disapproval, but felt reasonably convinced that Mrs. Thornton would be both disappointed and aggrieved. Certainly she had never hesitated to announce that she expected her son Dick to make a brilliant match. How could she then be satisfied with a western girl of no wealth or distinction?

It happened that Dick Thornton also had a private reason for finally agreeing to Barbara's wish. His experiences in the past two years had given him a new point of view toward life. No longer was he willing to be known

only as his father's son and to continue being supported by him. Before Dick married he intended making a position for himself, so as to be able to take care of his own wife.

Nona also recalled that she was really responsible for their coming into Russia. It had seemed to her that they must make their Red Cross work complete by nursing in the largest of the Allied countries.

However, Nona had now to cease her reflections, for she had come to a place in the road where she had been told to turn aside.

To make sure the girl opened her note and re-read it for probably the tenth time. Yes, here were the three pine trees, green shadows against the autumn sky, and here also was the narrow path that began alongside of them.

After another fifteen minutes' walk Nona discovered that she was approaching a hut of the poorest character. It was built of logs, with mud roughly filling up a number of cracks.

Already Nona was learning to understand that the Russian poor are perhaps the poorest people in the world. This hut was not so poverty-stricken as many others she had seen; at least, there were two windows and a front door.

Outside a hungry dog prowled about, showing not the slightest interest in the newcomer. Yet Nona was vaguely frightened. She stopped for a moment to reflect. Should she go in or not? The place looked ugly and depressing and she could see no signs of human beings.

Yet perhaps there was illness inside the house and she had been sent for to give aid. If that were true she must not hesitate.

As Nona lifted her hand to knock at the door, suddenly it occurred to her as curious that the note she had received had been written upon extremely fine paper and in a handwriting which revealed breeding and education. Yet this peasant's hut suggested neither the one nor the other.

But Nona was more mystified than fearful since her Red Cross uniform was her protection, and these were not days when one dared think of oneself.

She knocked quietly but firmly on the wooden door.

The next moment the heavy bar was slipped aside. Then Nona saw a woman of about thirty-five, dressed in the costume of a Russian peasant, standing with both hands outstretched toward her.

“My dear,” she began in perfect English, “this is better fortune than I dreamed, to find you once again, and in Russia, of all countries!”

[Back to contents](#)

CHAPTER II

A Former Acquaintance

“

BUT,” Nona began, and then hesitated, feeling extraordinarily puzzled. The face of the woman before her was oddly familiar, although she could not at the instant recall where or when she had known her.

Yet she remembered the deep blue-gray eyes with their perfectly penciled dark brows and lashes, even the rather sad expression of them. However, she must be mistaken, since she could have no acquaintance in Russia!

However, she allowed herself to be quietly led inside the hut, where the door was immediately closed behind her. Then the girl followed the woman inside a bare chamber, furnished with only a few chairs and a rough table. In an upper corner hung an ikon, the Russian image of the Christ. The face of the Christ was painted in brilliant colors set inside a brass square and this square enclosed in a dark wooden frame.

The ikon is to the Russian what the crucifix is to the Roman Catholic. No orthodox Russian home is ever without one.

But after the first glance, Nona Davis gave no further consideration to her surroundings. Before her companion could speak the second time she had suddenly recognized her.

“Why, Lady Dorian, what has brought you to Russia? You are the last person I expected to see! Since our meeting on board the ‘Philadelphia’ and your stay at the Sacred Heart Hospital I have so often wondered what had become of you, and if you were well and happy. You promised to write me.”

“Then you have not forgotten me?” Before saying anything more the older woman found a chair for her guest and another for herself.

“No, I have not written you, but I have thought of you many times and have followed your history more closely than you dream,” she returned quietly, yet with evident earnestness. “I have been well and I suppose as happy as most people. How can any human being be anything but wretched during this tragic war? If only we might have peace!”

Lady Dorian’s face became white and drawn and Nona felt that she had aged a great deal since their first meeting, and indeed since the months they had spent as fellow workers for the British soldiers at the Sacred Heart Hospital. Nevertheless she still felt strangely attracted toward her companion, although mingled with the attraction was a new and uncomfortable feeling of distrust.

Lady Dorian had come to the hospital cleared of the charge made against her on board the “Philadelphia” of being a spy. Yet she had never given any explanation of her history. Then had followed her surprising meeting with the British officer, Colonel Dalton, and their betrayal of a former acquaintanceship. Although the older woman had promised to

explain their connection later, she had only said that they had once known each other rather intimately in London. But as they were friends no longer, she preferred not speaking of him again.

All this passed swiftly through Nona's mind while the older woman was speaking. But the girl devoutly hoped that her face did not betray her thoughts. For here was the most surprising situation of all! Lady Dorian had seemed to be a woman of wealth at the beginning of their acquaintance and certainly had given a large sum of money to the Sacred Heart Hospital. Now to find her dressed as a peasant and living in a peasant's hut in Russia!

Her skirt was of some cheap black material and her bodice of velveteen, laced with black cords over a white cotton waist. She also wore a Russian peasant's apron of brighter colors.

Yet Nona recognized the older woman's beauty and distinction in spite of her costume, even while her present circumstances and her eccentricities antagonized her visitor.

The woman was sitting with her level brows drawn together looking closely at the younger girl.

"I am sorry you don't seem to feel your former faith in me, Nona," she began unexpectedly. "Not that I blame you, for I do not know myself whether it is wise for me to have intruded into your life again. I would not have done so if there had not been a reason more important than you can appreciate."

For a moment the girl's attention had been wandering, engaged by the oddness of her surroundings, but now she tried to conceal her growing discomfort. Lady Dorian was appearing more mysterious than ever! If she

desired to renew their acquaintance because they had formerly liked each other, that was a sufficient reason for her summons. It was scarcely worth while to try to produce other motives.

But Lady Dorian had gotten up and now stood facing her.

“What I am going to tell you is extraordinary, Nona, although life is too full of strange happenings to make us wonder at anything. In the first place, will you please cease to call me *Lady Dorian*, for that is not my name. Nor is it remarkable for you to discover me living in Russia, because I am a Russian by birth. I have not always made my home in my own country, but that makes no difference, since my love and sympathy have always been with my own people. Here I am only known as

‘Sonya.’ But I do not wish to speak of myself, but of you. I have a strong reason for my interest in you, Nona, for although you may find it hard to believe, I once knew your mother.”

“Knew my mother?” The young American girl scarcely understood what was being said. She was so many thousands of miles both in fact and in thought from her own home and her own history. She could not believe that her companion was telling the truth. In any case she was merely mistaking her for some one else.

So Nona shook her head gravely. “I am sorry, but I don’t think that possible,” she explained. “My mother was a southern woman, who lived very quietly in an old-fashioned city. I can’t see how your lives could ever have touched.”

Until this instant Nona had remained seated with her former friend standing before her.

She did not realize how much she showed her resentment at this use of her mother's name. Now she made an effort to rise from her chair.

"I am very happy to have seen you again," she protested in the formal manner which Barbara Meade sometimes admired and at other times resented.

But her companion was not influenced and indeed paid no attention to the younger girl's hauteur. She merely put a restraining hand on her shoulder, adding,

"It is not worth while for us to argue that point until you hear what I have to say. The fact is, I know more of your mother, Nona, than you do yourself. For one thing, your mother was also a Russian. She was older than I, but we were together at one time in the United States. She went to visit in New Orleans and there met your father and married. I knew she had a daughter by your name, but curiously when I first met you on board the steamer your name conveyed nothing to me. Perhaps the last thing I expected was to find the daughter of your father, General Robert Davis, serving as a Red Cross nurse. He was a conservative of the old school, and I supposed would never have allowed you to leave home. But after we came together again and I met you for the second time at the Sacred Heart Hospital, I began to think of what association I had with your name. Soon I remembered and then I endeavored to discover your history. There was a chance that the name had no connection with the girl I sought. But it was simple enough to make the discovery."

"Simple enough to make the discovery!" Stupidly Nona Davis repeated the words aloud, because they puzzled her. Then it occurred to her that the woman before her was so associated with mysteries that a family problem

must be comparatively simple. Doubtless she had been able to discover more of Nona's mother's history than she herself had ever found out.

But Nona was by no means pleased with the thought of an association between her own people and Lady Dorian, who had just frankly confessed that this name had been an assumed one.

Nor did she wish to go into the subject of her family connection with so uncomfortable a stranger. First she wished to have time to think the situation over and to try to make it clearer to her own mind. Then she wished to discuss it with Mildred and Barbara.

The girl glanced at the old-fashioned watch belonging to her father, which she always wore. In the back it held her mother's picture, but not for worlds would she have revealed this fact at the moment.

Curious that she should feel this extreme distrust of her companion, when she had been her ardent defender in their earlier acquaintance! But then she had never expected to be drawn into any intimacy with her.

Besides, Russia was an incomprehensible country. The class distinctions which had so impressed her in England were as nothing to the differences in rank here.

Russia, in truth, seemed a land of princes and paupers! To a girl of Nona Davis' ideas and training, to find herself associated with the lower orders of Russian society was distinctly disagreeable. She had lived so long on the tradition of family that social position seemed of first importance.

Now her former acquaintance was living in a peasant's house and was dressed like a peasant woman. Some strange change must have taken place

in her life to reduce her to such a position, when previously she had given the impression of wealth and distinction.

Nona got up hurriedly, drawing her coat about her. Later perhaps she might be willing to hear what the other woman wished to confide, but not today.

Yet Nona felt that she did not wish to look into her companion's eyes. She must try not to think of her any longer as Lady Dorian, though "Sonya" was an exquisite Russian name, it certainly gave no clue to her identity.

However, she could not fail to see that the other woman's expression revealed surprise and sorrow at her attitude, but was without resentment. It was as if she had grown accustomed to distrust and coldness.

"I am sorry you don't wish me to speak of your mother, Nona. It is true I can give you no explanation of the change in my surroundings, but the present need not affect the past. I know that your father has kept your mother's story a secret from you. Yet there is nothing in it of which you may not be proud, that is, if you have the nature which I have hoped to find in you."

Embarrassed and yet determined not to listen any further, Nona continued obstinately walking toward the door, with Sonya quietly following her.

"Will you wait a moment, please?" the older woman asked. "I have two friends here in the house with me, whom I would like you to meet. When you talk me over with Mildred and Barbara to find out their opinion of me and of what I have tried to tell you, you can explain to them that I am not alone. I realize that I have always been a mystifying acquaintance and I'm

sorry, but it is not possible to tell you my history at present. Some day I may be able to explain.”

Sonya’s tone was half grave and half gay. Moreover, her blue eyes with their curiously dark brows and lashes watched the younger girl with an almost wistful affection.

The situation was more than puzzling. Yet, although she grew more anxious each minute to be away, Nona could only agree to her companion’s request.

For a moment she was left alone in the crude, bare room. It was cheerless and cold and she grew even more uncomfortable. Surely, Russia was the strangest land in the world. How could her history as a young American girl have any connection with it? Why had she so insisted upon continuing her Red Cross nursing in Russia, when without her urging the other Red Cross girls would have been content to remain where they were?

The next moment a very old woman and a man came into the room with Sonya. There was no doubting they were both peasants. With them it was not merely a matter of rough clothes. They were both heavily built, with stupid, sad faces and they mumbled something in broken English when they were introduced to Nona, eyeing her with suspicion. It was only when their gaze rested upon Sonya that their faces changed. Then it was as though a light had shone through darkness.

Sonya introduced them by name, some queer Russian name which Nona could not grasp.

However, she was trying her best to find something civil to say in return, which they might be able to understand, when an unexpected noise

interrupted them.

Some one had unceremoniously opened the door in the hall and was walking toward them.

For an instant Nona thought she saw a shade of anxiety cross the faces of her three companions, but the next instant it was gone.

Nona could scarcely swallow a gasp of surprised admiration when, soon after, the door opened.

A young Russian soldier entered the room. He wore the uniform of a Cossack: the high boots, the fur cap and tunic.

To Nona Davis' American eyes the young man seemed a typical Russian of the better classes. He was extremely handsome, more than six feet tall, with dark hair and eyes and a colorless skin.

He appeared surprised at Nona's presence, but explained that he was stationed at the Russian fort where a number of wounded were being cared for. He remembered having seen Nona and her two friends. They were the only American nurses in the vicinity, so it was not strange to have noticed them.

Michael Orlaff was the soldier's name. Sonya spoke it with distinctness, but gave him no title. Yet evidently they knew each other very well.

A moment later and Nona finally got away. She was late and nervous about returning to the fortifications alone. Yet as she hurried on she was thinking over the afternoon until her head ached with the mystery of it. Perhaps it might be wise if she could avoid meeting this particular group of people again.

[Back to contents](#)

CHAPTER III

General Alexis

ALL that day Mildred Thornton had scarcely left the bedside of her patient.

For the Russian boy was dying, and as there was no hope for him, Mildred could only do her best to make him as comfortable as possible.

Now he seemed half asleep, so with her hands folded in her lap the girl sat near him trying to rest, although unable to keep her mind as quiet as her hands.

How strange her surroundings! Since her arrival in Europe as a Red Cross nurse she had lived and worked in two other countries and certainly had passed through remarkable experiences, yet none of them were to be compared with these few weeks of nursing in Russia. One might have been transferred to another planet instead of another land.

As an ordinary American tourist, Mildred had been familiar with Europe for several years, having spent three summers abroad traveling with her parents. But this was her first vision of the East, for Russia is eastern, however she may count herself otherwise.

The American girl now lifted her eyes from the figure of the dying boy and let them wander down the length of the room which sheltered them.

An immense place, it held rows on rows of other cot beds with white-clad nurses passing about among them. When they spoke or when the patients spoke Mildred could rarely guess what was being said, as she knew so few words of Russian. Yet she had little difficulty with her nursing, for the ways of the ill are universal and she had already seen so much suffering.

Now the hospital room was in half shadow, but it was never light nor aired as the American nurse felt it should be.

The hospital quarters were only a portion of the fortress, a great room, like a barracks which had been hastily turned into a refuge for the wounded.

The long stone chamber boasted only four small windows hardly larger than portholes and some distance from the ground. These opened with difficulty and were protected by heavy iron bars. But then in Russia in many private houses no window is ever voluntarily opened from autumn until Easter, as the cold is so intense and the arrangements for heating so crude.

Today Mildred wondered if the heavy, sick-laden air was giving her extraordinary fancies. She kept seeing dream pictures. For as she stared about the cold chamber of sorrow she beheld with greater distinctness the image of her own rooms at home.

This was the hour when the maid came to light her yellow-shaded electric candles; then she would put a fresh log on the fire and stir it to brightness, not because the added warmth was needed in their big steam-heated house, but because of the cheerfulness. Then would follow her

mother's invitation to drink a cup of tea with her and Dick in the library, or would she prefer having it served in her own room?

With this thought the girl's eyes clouded for a moment. Doubtless Dick and her mother would be having tea together this afternoon and Dick would in all probability be trying to explain why his sister was not with him. During her work in France and Belgium her mother and father had been more than kind, but with this suggestion of coming into Russia to continue her nursing both her parents had protested.

It is true that they had not actually demanded her presence at home, for she would not have disobeyed a command. But undoubtedly they had urged her homecoming.

Her father longed for her because of the rare affection between them and the fact that he dreaded the conditions and experiences that might await her and her friends in Russia. For these same reasons her mother also desired her return, yet Mildred knew that there was another motive actuating her mother. She might be unconscious of the fact, but if her daughter should reappear in New York society at the present time, because of her war experiences she would become an object of unusual interest and attention.

At this instant the smile that appeared at the corners of the girl's mouth banished the tired expression it had previously worn. One big thing her war experiences had done for Mildred Thornton, it had given her a new sense of values. Now she *knew* the things that counted. She had learned to smile at her own failure as a society girl, even to understand and forgive her mother's chagrin at the fact.

Yet Mildred was influenced in a measure to continue her work in Europe by these trivial points of view.

Should she return home and re-enter society as her mother wished, sooner or later she must prove a second disappointment. For she had no social gifts; she could never learn to talk as her friends did. If questions were asked of her she could only reply with facts, not because she was lacking in sympathy or imagination, but because she had not the grace of words. So with neither beauty nor charm, how could she ever even hope to gratify her mother by securing the distinguished husband she so desired for her?

But since there was a place in the world for bees as well as butterflies, Mildred never meant to allow herself to grow unhappy again. She had a real talent for nursing; her work had received only praise. So here in Europe, where there seemed to be the greatest need of her services, she meant to remain as long as possible. This, in spite of the alluring picture of home which would thrust itself before her consciousness.

At this instant the boy on the bed moved and sighed and at the same instant the American girl forgot herself. He had opened his eyes and Mildred could see that he had become dimly conscious of his own condition and his surroundings.

But this boy could never have been more than dimly conscious of most things in his short life, he was so stupid and could neither read nor write; indeed, he had a vocabulary of but a few hundred words. Peter had been a laborer on the estates of a Polish nobleman when the call came to arms. And so often in the past week while she had been caring for him Mildred had been reminded of some farm animal by the way the boy endured pain, he had been so dumb and uncomplaining.

Even now he made no attempt to speak, but as she leaned over and took his hand Mildred realized that the boy could live but a few moments longer.

After a little tender smoothing of his cover the girl turned away. The Russian peasant is always a devout Catholic, so Mildred realized that he would wish a priest with him at the end.

She had walked only a few feet from the young soldier's bedside when an unaccustomed atmosphere of excitement in the ward arrested her attention.

It would not be necessary for her to summon a priest; some one must have anticipated her desire. For the priest was even now approaching. However, he was a familiar figure, passing hourly among the wounded and their attendants; his presence would cause no excitement.

The next instant Mildred understood the priest was not alone. He was accompanied by one of the most famous men in all Europe.

Although she had never seen him until this instant, Mildred Thornton had not a moment's doubt of the man's identity. This was the Commander of the fortress at Grovno, General Dmitri Alexis, at the present hour the bulwark of many Russian hopes.

For the past few weeks the Germans had been driving the Russians farther and farther back beyond the boundaries of Poland and near the heart of Russia. Here at Grovno the Russian army was expected to make a victorious stand. The faith of the Russian people was centered in General Dmitri Alexis.

Unlike most Russian officers, he had always been devoted to the interests of the common people, although a son of one of Russia's noble families. But he was known to be a shy, quiet man with little to say for himself, who had risen to his present rank by sheer ability.

To Mildred's eyes he seemed almost an old man; in fact, he must have been about fifty. His hair was iron gray, but unlike most Russians his eyes were a dark blue. As he wore no beard, the lines about his mouth were so stern as to be almost forbidding.

Mildred knew that he was an intimate personal friend of the Czar and realized just to what extent he must feel the weight of his present responsibilities.

Therefore she was the more surprised at his appearance in the hospital ward.

Except for a courtly inclination of his head the great man paid no attention to the greetings that were offered him by the nurses and doctors. Walking down the center of the room he had eyes only for the wounded men who lined the two walls. Then his sternness relaxed and his smile became a curious compound of pity and regret.

Mildred found herself staring without regard to good manners or breeding. Why should this man create such an atmosphere of trust and respect? She had seen other great generals in the armies of the Allies before today, but never one who had made such an impression.

General Alexis and the priest paused by the bedside of the Russian boy who was Mildred's patient.

There the great man's face softened until it became almost womanish in its sympathy. Slowly and reverently the dying boy attempted to raise his general's hand to his lips.

General Alexis said a few words in Russian which the young soldier understood, but Mildred could not. For he attempted to shake his head, to whisper a denial, then smiling dropped his arms down by his sides.

Mildred made no effort to move forward to assist him, for she did not feel that she had a place in the little group at this moment. She merely watched and waited, trying to see clearly through the mist in her eyes.

The boy's broad chest, strong once as a young giant's, but now with a scarcely beating heart beneath it, quivered with what seemed a final emotion. The same instant General Alexis leaned down and pinned against the white cotton of his rough shirt the iron cross of all the Russias. Afterwards he kissed him as simply as a woman might have done.

That was all! So natural and so quiet it was, Mildred Thornton herself was hardly aware of the significance of the little scene she had just witnessed.

Here in a country where the gulf between the rich and the poor, the humble and the great was well nigh impassable, a single act of courage had bridged it.

What act of valor Peter had performed Mildred never knew. She only knew that it had called from his duties one of the greatest men in Europe, that he might by his presence and with his own hands show homage to the humblest of soldiers.

When the simple ceremony was over the boy lay quite still, scarcely noticing that his general knelt down beside his bed. For his eyes were almost closing.

Neither did Mildred dare move or speak.

Against the walls the other nurses and doctors stood quiet as wooden figures, while the wounded were hushed to unaccustomed silences.

Then the Russian priest began to intone in words which the American girl could not understand, but in a voice the most wonderful she had ever heard. His tones were those of an organ deep and beautiful, of great volume but without noise.

Ceasing, he lifted an ikon before the young soldier's dimming eyes, and pronounced what must have been a benediction.

The next moment the great stillness had entered the hospital chamber and the Russian boy with the iron cross above his heart lay in his final sleep.

All at once Mildred Thornton felt extraordinarily weary. Backward and forward she could see the big room rise and recede as though it had been an immense wave. The dim light was turning to darkness, when instinctively reaching out her hand touched the back of a chair. With this she steadied herself for the moment. Until now she had not known how tired she was from her vigil, nor how she had been moved by the scene she had just witnessed. After a little she would go to her own room and perhaps Nona or Barbara would be there. But she must wait until General Alexis and the priest had gone away.

The next moment she realized that the great man had risen and was approaching toward her.

Mildred looked wholly unlike a Russian woman. Her heavy flaxen hair, simply braided and twisted about her head, showed a few strands underneath her nurse's cap. Her face was almost colorless, yet her pallor was unlike the Russian, which is of a strange olive tone. Now and then in her nurse's costume Mildred Thornton became almost beautiful, through her air of strength and refinement and the unusual sweetness of her expression.

The eyes that were turned toward General Alexis were a clear blue-gray, but there were deep circles under them, and the girl swayed a little in spite of her effort to stand perfectly still.

For several seconds the great man regarded her in silence. Then he stretched forth his hand.

"You are an American Red Cross nurse, I believe. May I have the honor of shaking your hand. I have been told that three young American women are here at our fortress at Grovno helping to care for our wounded. You have traveled many miles for a noble cause. In the name of my Emperor and his people may I thank you."

The little speech was made in perfect English and with such simplicity that Mildred did not feel awed or surprised.

However, she was not certain how she replied or if she replied at all. She only felt her cold fingers held in a hand like steel and the next moment the great general had gone out of the room.

Immediately after Mildred found herself surrounded by a group of Russian nurses. The Russians are amazing linguists and several of the nurses could speak English. Evidently they were overwhelmed by the honor the American girl had just had bestowed upon her. It had almost overshadowed for the time the greater glory of the young soldier.

An American Red Cross nurse had been individually thanked by one of the greatest commanders in Europe for her service and the services of her friends to his soldiers and his country.

But there was another personal side to the situation which the Russian hospital staff appeared to find more amazing.

General Dmitri Alexis was supposed never to speak to a woman. He was an old bachelor and was said to greatly despise the frivolities of Russian society women.

Incredible as it may seem, there is gossip even inside a great fortress in time of war.

But Mildred's Russian companions had neither time nor opportunity to reveal much to her at present. As soon as it was possible she begged that she might be allowed to go to her own room. Although she shared it with Nona and Barbara, neither one of them was there at the time.

But instead of lying down at once Mildred wrote a few lines to her mother. She knew that she would be greatly pleased by the attention that had just been paid her. Of course Mildred realized that the General's thanks were not bestowed upon her as an individual, but as a representative of the United States, whose sympathy and friendliness Russia so greatly appreciated.

[Back to contents](#)

CHAPTER IV

An Encounter

BARBARA had been writing a letter to Dick Thornton. She was seated on the side of her cot bed in a tiny room high up in a tower, with only one small window overlooking the courtyard below.

Although it was well into the twentieth century, this room was just such an one as might have concealed the hapless Amy Robsart in the days of Lord Leicester and Kenilworth Castle. But although Barbara had not to suffer the thought of a faithless lover, at the present moment she was feeling extremely sorry for herself.

Russia had no charms for her as it appeared to have for Mildred Thornton and Nona Davis. She disliked its bleakness, its barbarity and the strange, moody people it contained. Of course she realized that there was another side to Russian life, before the present war its society was one of the gayest in the world. But these days, when the Germans were driving the Russian army backward and even further backward behind their own frontiers, were days for work and silence, not social amusements. Moreover, Barbara knew that she could never expect to have any part in Russian social life when her mission lay among the wounded. So far she

had met only other Red Cross nurses, a few physicians and the soldiers who required her care. But really Barbara was not so foolish as to resent these conditions; she was merely homesick and anxious to see Dick Thornton, and if not Dick, then Eugenia.

France had not seemed so far away from the United States and she had loved France and its brave, gay people. She had understood them and their life. Almost she had envied Eugenia her future possession of the old chateau and the little "Farmhouse with the Blue Front Door." But then Eugenia had seemed to find France as strange and uncongenial as Barbara now considered Russia.

Even after her marriage to Captain Castaigne, Eugenia had confessed to the younger girl how she dreaded her own inability to become a Frenchwoman. She still feared that she would never be equal to the things Captain Castaigne had a right to expect of her, once the war was over. Eugenia had merely cared too much to be willing to give him up, but was too wise to expect that her problems would end with marriage.

So with this thought Barbara Meade finally removed a tear from the end of her nose. It had trickled quite comfortably out of her eyes, but as her nose was somewhat retroussé, it had hesitated there.

After all, an American marriage was best for an American girl! Barbara tried to convince herself that she should be rejoicing instead of lamenting. Certainly Dick was the most agreeable and to be desired person in the entire world. But then there was another side to this! Had he not been, perhaps she would not at this moment be missing him so terribly and at all the moments. Letters were so infrequent! Mrs. Thornton might positively refuse to allow her son to marry so insignificant a person, and Dick forget all about her!

But in the midst of this last and most harrowing thought, fortunately Nona Davis came into the room.

She looked excited, but on catching sight of her friend's face her expression changed.

"Good heavens, Barbara!" she began. Then the next moment she walked over and tilted the other girl's chin with her hand.

"You are just homesick, aren't you, and longing for some one who shall be nameless? You frightened me at first; I feared you had heard dreadful news. Come, get your coat and have a walk with me. We have both nearly two hours of freedom and I've permission to go outside the fortifications."

The other girl shook her head and shivered.

"It is too cold, Nona dear, and besides, I'm afraid. I know the Russians are said to be holding the line of fortifications beyond us, but then the Germans may break through at any time. Goodness knows, I don't see what you and Mildred find so fascinating in Russia! I am afraid I am not brave enough to have come with you."

While Barbara was arguing Nona had taken her coat from its hook on the wall and was putting it about her friend.

"Yes, I know all that, but just the same you are coming for a walk. As long as you are here you must keep strong enough to do your work. But there, I can't scold half so well as Eugenia. I suppose if Dick belonged to me I should be as wretched as you are without him. You are a dear to have stuck by Mildred and me during this Russian work. But do come, I've

something really interesting to tell you. Perhaps you may feel a tiny bit less lonely afterwards.”

In the meantime Nona had put on her own coat and cap and the two girls started. They had to walk down a narrow stone corridor and then a long flight of winding stone steps to reach the courtyard below.

To the right the soldiers were drilling. One could hear the harsh clatter of their heavy boots and the crash of their rifles when they touched the frozen earth.

It had turned unexpectedly cold, and yet without a spoken word both girls stopped and stared about them as soon as they reached the outdoors.

Certainly the scene formed an extraordinary setting for two young American girls!

The sky was gray, and although it was only early autumn, there were occasional flurries of snow.

Behind them stood a long, low line of stone and iron fortifications with enormous guns mounted at intervals along the walls. At one end was an observation tower, where one could see miles on miles of trenches stretching in a kind of semicircle before the fortifications. Should the enemy destroy the trenches the Russian soldiers could then mass behind the fort and afterwards, if necessary, accomplish their retreat. For a small force could delay the enemy through the strength of their position and the use of their big guns.

Sheltered behind breastworks of earth, barbed wire entanglements and a natural protection of trees, the girls could barely discern the aerodrome. In

this place were situated the machine shops for building and repairing aeroplanes, and also from here their flights and returns could be made.

Yet in spite of these signs of active warfare, the place was curiously silent. Barbara felt puzzled. Only the endless tramp, tramp of the soldiers at drill and an occasional guttural command. The noises from the inside of the fort never penetrated to the outside. But then these Russians were a quiet people.

Within a few moments the two girls showed their order to the sentry and were allowed to pass beyond the gate. They then started on their walk along the same road which Nona had traveled alone several days before. But actually this was the first chance the girls had for talking over Nona's experiences together. True, they shared the same bedroom, so that on her return Nona had given a brief report. But really they had been too tired at night to grasp the situation.

Now naturally Barbara thought her companion meant to talk of her recent experience. Neither one of them attempted conversation at the beginning of their walk, for the main road was as filled with supplies of every kind that were being hauled to the great fort, as it had been on the day of Nona's solitary excursion. But indeed this was a daily occurrence.

So, as soon as possible, the girls got away from the road into a lane that was lined with peasants' huts. This lay in an opposite direction from the path Nona had previously taken. She had no desire to meet her former acquaintance again until she had made up her mind as to her own attitude toward her.

Neither Barbara nor Mildred had so far been able to give her any definite advice.

Mildred really refused to consider that the older woman could have known Nona's mother years before in their own country. Her story was too incredible to be believed.

Barbara had not taken this same point of view. At the present moment she was going over the situation in retrospection. In the first place, it was absurd to think that any train of circumstances could be impossible in such a surprising world. The woman, whom they had once known as Lady Dorian and whom they now were to think of by another name, had evidently once been a woman of wealth and culture, no matter what her present condition of poverty. She seemed to have traveled everywhere and she may of course have met Nona Davis' family. There was actually no reason why she should not have known them, Barbara concluded in her sensible western fashion. Doubtless when Nona allowed the older woman to explain the situation it would not be half so mysterious as it now appeared. The really remarkable thing was, not that the other woman should be familiar with Nona's mother's history, but that her own daughter should be so in ignorance.

For her part she intended to advise Nona to listen to whatever their former friend wished to tell her. But just as Barbara opened her lips to offer this advice, her companion spoke.

"Barbara, you have been in such a study you haven't asked for the piece of news I have to give you. Do you remember almost quarreling with me because I did not wish to write a note to the English fellow we once knew when we were in Brussels, after you discovered him in prison there?"

Barbara nodded, her mind immediately distracted from her former train of thought.

“Lieutenant Hume? Why, do you know what has become of him?” she inquired.

In reply Nona took a letter out of her pocket.

“I had a note from him today. You see, after your lecture I continued writing him in prison every now and then during the year we spent in Belgium. Just occasionally he was allowed to send me a few lines in reply. Then a long time passed and I had almost forgotten him. Now he writes to say that by an extraordinary freak of fortune he has been returned home. It seems that he became very ill, so when the Germans decided to agree on an exchange of prisoners, he and our little blind Frenchman, Monsieur Bébé, were both sent back to their own lands. Lieutenant Hume does not say what is the matter with him. His letter isn’t about himself. He is really tremendously anxious to hear news of us. He has just learned of Eugenia’s marriage to Henri Castaigne, and he thinks we are pretty foolhardy to have offered our services for nursing in Russia.”

Instinctively Barbara held her companion’s arm in a closer grasp.

“Far be it from me to disagree with him!” she murmured.

For her attention had just been arrested by the noise of a horse’s hoofs approaching. Both girls looked up to see a young Cossack soldier riding toward them. He sat his horse as though he were a part of it, his feet swinging in long stirrups and his hands barely touching the reins.

Both girls felt a stirring sense of admiration. But to their surprise, as the horse drew near the young soldier pulled up and slid quietly to the ground.

The next instant he came up toward Nona.

“You will pardon me,” he said, speaking English, although with a noticeable accent, “but it will not be wise for you to continue to walk any further along this road. It is growing late and there are stragglers coming in from several villages where a German raid is feared.”

He had taken off his pointed Cossack cap of lamb’s wool and held it in his hand as though he had been a young American meeting a group of friends upon an ordinary thoroughfare.

Barbara was struck by the incongruity of his appearance and his behavior. He looked like a half-civilized warrior of centuries ago, and yet his manner was the conventional one of today. However, it would not be wise to expect him to remain conventional under unusual conditions. Barbara could see that the young Russian officer was a son of the east, not the west. He had a peculiar Oriental pallor and long, slanting dark eyes, and his small black moustache scarcely concealed the thin red lines of his lips.

Nona was frowning at him in a puzzled fashion.

But the next instant she bowed with an expression of recognition.

“Thank you, we will do as you suggest. It is odd to see you so soon again after our unexpected meeting the other afternoon. Lieutenant Orlaff, this is my friend, Miss Meade.”

Barbara inclined her head, too surprised to do more. But as the Russian officer continued to walk beside them with his horse following, she soon understood where he and Nona had met each other.

“Yes, she is an old friend, Sonya Valesky. I knew her years ago and then she went away into other countries.”

The young Russian hesitated. Barbara and Nona were both watching his face closely, so that they could see the cloud of doubt, even of struggle, that swept over it.

“You are strangers in my country, but you have come here to help us in our need,” he protested, almost as if he were thinking aloud.

“I would not have you doubt my friend. I cannot explain to you, and yet I wish to warn you. Do not be too intimate with Sonya Valesky. Russia is not like other countries in times of war or peace. She has many problems, tragedies of her own to overcome which the foreigner cannot understand. Forgive me if I should not have spoken.”

Then before either girl could fully grasp what the young man’s confused speech could mean, he had bowed, mounted his horse and ridden off.

[Back to contents](#)

CHAPTER V

Out of the Past

BUT circumstances afterwards made it impossible for Nona Davis to follow the young Russian officer's advice.

A week went by at the hospital without a decision on the girl's part and without another word from her former friend. Sonya Valesky she must remember was her Russian name. A beautiful name and somehow it seemed to fit the personality of the woman whom Nona at once admired and distrusted. For the name carried with it its own suggestion of beauty and of melancholy. What secret could Sonya Valesky be concealing that forced even her friends to warn others against her?

Of course there could be no answer in her own consciousness to this puzzle, yet Nona kept the problem at the back of her mind during the following week of strenuous work. Nursing inside the bleak fortress at Grovno was of a more difficult character than any work the three American Red Cross girls had yet undertaken. The surroundings were so uncomfortable, the nursing supplies so limited. Worse than anything else, an atmosphere of almost tragic suspense hung like a palpable cloud over every inmate of the fort.

Authentic news was difficult to obtain, yet refugees were constantly pouring in with stories of fresh German conquests in Poland. For it chanced that the months after the arrival of the three American girls in Russia were among the darkest in Russia's history during the great war. Military strategists might be able to understand why the Grand Duke Nicholas and his army were giving way before almost every furious German onslaught. They could explain that he was endeavoring to lead the enemy deeper and deeper into a foreign land, so as to cut them off from their base of supplies. Yet it was hard for the ordinary man and woman or the common soldier to conceive of anything except fresh danger and disaster in each defeat.

So day after day, night after night the business of strengthening the line of fortifications at Grovno went on. The work was done with the silence and the industry of some enormous horde of ants.

Shut off in the left wing of the fort with the ill and wounded soldiers, the Red Cross nurses had only occasional glimpses of the warlike preparations that were being made. Once when there was a review of the troops in the courtyard behind the fortifications Mildred Thornton summoned Nona and Barbara. She had already told them of her experience with the commanding officer of the fort, but she wished the other two girls to have a look at him. It was difficult to get a vivid impression of a personality from a bird's-eye view out of a small upper window. Yet the figure of General Alexis could never be anything but dominating. There was a hush of admiration from every man or woman inside the fortifications whenever their leader's name was mentioned. If he could not hold the German avalanche in check, then the world must weep for Russia. So Mildred became a kind of heroine among the nurses because she had received a few moments of the great man's praise and attention.

Finally, at the end of a week Nona Davis had a second letter from Sonya Valesky. It was sent by a messenger, as the other had been, and Nona was presented with it when she first went on duty on one Saturday morning.

This communication was not merely a note, however, for the envelope was sealed and had a bulky appearance. Yet Nona did not open it all that day or the morning of the next as she had a premonition that the letter was not an ordinary one. Either Madame Valesky was confiding her own history, or she was insisting upon proving to the American girl that she had at one time been a friend of her mother's. Really, it was this information that Nona both expected and feared. So as she had a particularly difficult case on hand she decided to wait for more leisure before trying to solve the mystery.

The opportunity came when she was allowed two hours rest on Sunday afternoon.

Nona was glad that both Mildred and Barbara were busy at the time, because she preferred to be alone. After her letter had been read and considered then she could decide on the degree of her confidences.

But after all, Barbara's prediction came true. The story that Sonya Valesky had to tell of her acquaintance with Nona's mother was not half so strange as the fact that the mother's history had been concealed from her daughter.

The story was unique but comparatively simple. The only curious fact was the accidental meeting between the Russian woman and the American girl. But then just such comings together of persons with a common bond of interest or affection is an hourly occurrence in the world. Behind such apparent accidents is some law of nature, a like calling unto like.

The older woman explained that she had known Nona's mother many years ago when they were both children in Russia, although she was a number of years younger. There was as little as possible of Sonya Valesky's own history in the letter. She stated without proof or comment that her father had once been Russian Ambassador to the United States. Here Anna Orlaff, Nona's mother, had made her a visit and had then gone away south to New Orleans and soon afterwards married. For many years the younger girl had not seen her friend again. She had received letters from her, however, and learned that her marriage was not a success.

Sonya Valesky did her best to explain the situation to Nona. But how was she to know how much or how little an American girl understands of life and conditions in Russia? Was Nona aware that there were many girls and young men, oftentimes members of noble families, who believed in a new and different Russia?

Had Nona ever read of a great writer named Tolstoi, who wrote and preached of the real brotherhood of man? He insisted that the words of Christ should be interpreted literally and desired that Russia, and indeed the world, should have no rich and poor, no Czar and slave, but that all men and all women were to be truly equal. Nona's mother had been a follower of Tolstoi's principles; therefore, her people had sent her away from her own country because they feared if she continued to live in Russia with these ideas she might be condemned to Siberia. So Anna Orlaff had gladly left her own country, believing that in the United States she would find the spirit of true equality.

Naturally her marriage had been a disappointment. At this point in Sonya Valesky's letter, Nona Davis began to have a faint appreciation of the situation. She remembered the narrow, conservative life of the old south and

that her father had lived largely upon traditions of wealth and family, teaching her little else. What did it matter to him that there were no titles in America, no more slaves to do his bidding, when he continued to believe in the domination of one class over another.

Dimly at first, more vividly afterwards, Nona Davis could see the picture of the young Russian girl, a socialist and dreamer, married into such an environment. How disappointed and unhappy she must have been in the conservative old city of Charleston, South Carolina! No wonder people had never mentioned her name to her daughter, and that her father had been so silent! A Russian socialist was little less than a criminal.

Nona was seated in a hard wooden chair in a small, cell-like room many thousands of miles away from her own old home. Certainly something stronger than her own wish must have drawn her to Russia, for here she must learn to understand the story of her mother's life and to find her own place in it.

At this point in the narrative Nona let her letter fall idly in her lap. The girl's hands were clasped tightly together, for now her imagination could tell her more than any words of another's.

Her father had been devoted to her, but he had not been fair, neither had his friends nor her own. Why had they always led her to believe by their silences that there was something to be ashamed of in her mother's story? It was odd, of course, to be different from other people, but there was no sin in being a dreamer.

Nona could see the picture of her mother in the white muslin dress and the blue sash there in their old drawing room in Charleston. She had been only a girl of about her age when she remembered her.

But then what had become of her mother? Why had she gone away?

Again the girl picked up her letter, for the last few sheets must explain.

This portion was hardest of the story to understand, but Sonya Valesky had tried to make it clear.

Nona's father had insisted that his young wife give up her views of life. She was to read no books, write no letters, have nothing to do with any human being who thought as she did. Above all, she was to make him a written and sacred promise that she would never reveal her ideas of life to her daughter. This Nona's mother had refused to do and so had gone away, expecting to come back some day when her husband relented.

Within a year she had died. But here Sonya Valesky's letter ended, for she enclosed another written by Nona's mother to her friend.

If Nona had needed proof of the truth of the other woman's statement she could find it here. The letter was yellow with age and very short. It merely asked that if Sonya Valesky should ever find it possible to know her daughter, Nona Davis, would she be her friend?

Then Sonya had also enclosed another proof, if proof were needed. This was a small picture of Nona's mother which was exactly like the one the girl had found concealed in the back of her father's watch. It was the same watch with the same picture that she now wore always inside her dress.

Then for nearly an hour the young American girl sat dreaming almost without a movement of her body.

Little by little she recalled stray memories in her life which made her mother's history appear not so impossible as she had at first conceived.

Always she had thought of her as foreign. She had only believed her to be French because she spoke French so perfectly and had married in New Orleans. But then she herself was beginning to learn that educated Russians are among the most accomplished linguists in the world. What else was she to find out about this strange country before her work as a nurse was over? Could she ever feel so entirely an American again?

All at once Nona Davis jumped hastily to her feet. There were hundreds of questions she yearned to ask. Fortunately for her she was near the one person who might be able to answer them. Sonya Valesky had never said why she had not sought to find her friend's daughter until their accidental meeting on shipboard. Even then she had not recognized Nona's connection with the past. Was it because she was too engrossed in her own life and her own mysterious mission?

Although she was at this instant engaged in putting on her coat and cap to go to her, Nona again hesitated. How little the Russian woman had said of herself! What was she doing here near the Russian line of fortifications, living like a peasant with only two old peasants in attendance upon her? And why should the young Russian officer have warned her against his own friend?

"Michael Orlaff." Automatically Nona Davis repeated the name of her new acquaintance. "Orlaff." The name was the same as her mother's. Was there a chance that the young Russian lieutenant might be a possible connection?

However, the girl recognized that she was stupid to continue to ask herself questions. Moreover, she had now made up her mind that she must not distrust Sonya Valesky unless she had a more definite cause. Doubtless Sonya shared the same views of life that her mother had cherished! But in

any case it was wonderful to have found a woman who had been her mother's friend and who might still be hers.

Nona had walked across her small room to the door, when she heard some one knocking.

A summons had been sent for her to return to her nursing, as the two hours of her recreation were over. How stupid she had been! Actually Nona had forgotten what had called her to Russia, even the war tragedy that was raging about her. Of course she could not leave the hospital! It might be several days or more before she could hope to receive permission to revisit Sonya.

[Back to contents](#)

CHAPTER VI

The Arrest

FIVE days later Nona Davis went again to the little wooden house, where, to her surprise, she had previously discovered a former acquaintance.

But on this occasion Sonya Valesky did not open the door.

Instead it was opened by the old peasant man whom Nona had seen before.

Today he looked more wretched than stupid. His little black eyes were red rimmed, his sallow skin more wrinkled than ever.

When Nona inquired for Sonya he shook his head disconsolately and then motioned her toward the same room she had formerly entered.

There was now a cot in the room and on this cot lay the Russian woman.

At once Nona forgot herself and her desire to ask questions. She remembered only her profession, yes, and one other thing. She recalled the words that the old French peasant, François, had once spoken to her and to Barbara.

“Have you pity only for wounded soldiers? Do girls and women never care to help one another? This war has made wounds deeper than any bullets can create.”

Immediately Nona had seen that Sonya Valesky was very ill. Now, no matter who she was, or what she had done, she must be restored to health. First and last Nona must put her own emotions aside, for the sake of her mission as a Red Cross nurse.

Yet what was she to do? Her services belonged to the soldiers in the Russian fortress.

As quietly and quickly as possible Nona gave her orders.

She could not be sure, but Sonya's appearance indicated that she was suffering from the terrible scourge of typhus.

This disease had been one of the most terrible results of the war. Because of a greater lack of sanitation and cleanliness the fever had been more widespread in Serbia and in Russia than in any other countries.

Personally Nona had never nursed a case before, yet she had heard the disease discussed and believed she recognized the symptoms.

First she made a thorough examination of the little house. It was cleaner than most of the peasants' huts, so far Sonya must have prevailed, but still its conditions left much to be desired.

Without being able to speak more than a few words of their language, Nona yet managed to give her directions.

She was beginning to guess that the old peasant couple, who at first had seemed mysterious companions for the beautiful Russian woman, were probably old servants. If Sonya was a follower of Tolstoi as her mother had been, she must have refused to recognize any difference between them.

But this was not their feeling. The American girl could see that in spirit old Katja and Nika were the devoted slaves of the younger woman.

Sonya was not at first conscious of the seriousness of her illness.

She wore a dressing gown of some rough homespun, a curious shade of Russian blue, the color of her own eyes. Her hair, which had turned far whiter in the past year, was partly concealed under a small lace cap such as the Russian peasant woman often wears. Then, although she did not seem able to talk, she knew Nona and thanked her for coming and for the advice she was giving the two old people.

But when Nona had finished with her orders she came and sat down near Sonya.

“I have read your letter and I have not been able to answer it until now. It seems like a miracle that I should have found out about my own mother here in a strange land. But perhaps I was meant to take care of you. You must promise to do what I tell you. I must go away now, but I’ll come back in a little while.”

Nona was getting up when Sonya took hold of her skirt.

Her face was flushed and her dark blue eyes shining.

“You must not stay in this house, not for long at a time,” she pleaded. “I cannot explain to you why not, but perhaps when I am strong again I can

tell you enough to have you guess the rest. Now you must go.”

Sonya took Nona’s cool hands in her hot ones and held them close for a moment.

The next moment the American girl had gone.

At the hospital inside the fortress she explained the situation, at least so far as it could be explained. A Russian woman, who had once been her friend, lay seriously ill at one of the nearby huts. Would one of the hospital physicians come and see her? Also would it be possible for her to be spared from caring for the soldiers to look after her woman friend?

Certainly a Russian doctor would attend the case; moreover, after certain formalities Nona was allowed a leave of absence from the hospital demands.

Then began an experience for the young American girl that nothing in her past two or more years of nursing had equaled.

She was living and working in a new world, amid surroundings which she could not understand and of which she was afraid.

The little hut was crude and lonely. The two old peasants could speak no English, but went about their tasks day after day mute and dolorous. Sonya was too ill to recognize her nurse, and Nona could not allow Barbara or Mildred to come near her, since her patient’s illness was of the most contagious nature.

Naturally Barbara and Mildred wholly disapproved of the risk Nona was running and she had not time nor strength to make them see her side of the situation. She had written them that Sonya Valesky had proved herself to

have been an old friend of her mother's. For that reason and for several others she felt it her duty to care for her.

But strangest of all Nona's experiences were the fragments of conversation which she heard from the lips of her ill friend.

Sonya sometimes spoke of her girlhood and then again of her life in the United States and in England. Once or twice she even called the name of Captain Dalton. Nona supposed that she must be recalling her meeting with Captain Dalton at the Sacred Heart Hospital. Then she remembered that Sonya had spoken of knowing the English officer years before.

But although her patient betrayed many facts of her past life to her nurse, never once did Sonya explain why she was living in such an out-of-the-way place. Neither did she give any clue to the kind of work that must have engaged her time and energy. Surely Sonya Valesky must have been upon some secret mission in the days of their first meeting on board the "Philadelphia!" Even then she had papers in her possession which she would allow no one to see.

However, Sonya was too desperately ill to permit her nurse much opportunity for surmising. Nona would never have left her alone for a moment except that she knew it was her duty to keep up her own strength.

Every afternoon she went for a short walk. And because no one but the Russian physician was allowed to enter the house, now and then the young Russian lieutenant would join Nona along the road. This could only occur when he was able to get leave, yet Nona began to hope for his coming. She was so depressed and lonely.

Once she asked him if he had ever heard of a member of his family named "Anna Orlaff." Of course she gave no reason for her question. But it made no difference, because the young soldier could recall no such person.

In the course of one of their talks, however, he confided to Nona that he was a younger brother, but that his family were members of the Russian nobility.

Never once, however, did the young man betray any fact connected with Sonya Valesky's history. He explained that their families had long known each other and that he had always been fond of her, nothing more.

So for this reason as well as others Nona found herself attracted by the young Russian officer. He seemed very simple, much younger than an American of the same age. At this time Michael Orlaff must have been about twenty-three. But Nona was wise enough to discover that he was not so simple and direct as she had first believed him. A Russian does not readily betray either his deeper thoughts or his deeper feelings. The young Russian lieutenant would not even speak of the war nor his own part in it. Yet Nona guessed from her own observation and from certain unconscious information that he was one of the favorite younger officers of the Russian general in command of the Grovno fortifications.

So a number of weeks passed, until now and then Nona Davis almost forgot the war and her original reasons for being in her present strange position. No one brought her papers; Barbara's and Mildred's letters contained little war news. The truth was possibly being concealed from them, or else there was no way of their discovering it.

So Nona was at least spared the anxiety of knowing that the victorious German hosts were drawing nearer and nearer the fortress of Grovno. Like

stone houses built by children the other ancient Russian forts had fallen before his “Excellenz von Beseler,” the victor of Antwerp, who was known as the German battering ram.

Even when Sonya opened her eyes, after weeks of an almost fatal illness, and asked for news of the war, Nona was unable to tell her.

Then as the days of Sonya’s convalescence went by she would not let her talk of it. Always war is a more terrible thing to girls and women than it is to boys and men. But ever since their first acquaintance Nona had realized that the horror of it went deeper into Sonya’s consciousness than any person she had yet seen. It must be the war that had aged her so in the past year.

So the Russian woman and the American girl spoke of everything else. Sonya told of her own life and of Nona’s mother when they were little girls. They had both been allowed to go away to college. It was in school that they imbibed their revolutionary ideas. No wonder that their families never forgave them!

Sonya was dressed and sitting in her chair the day when the summons finally came for her arrest.

It was Nona Davis in her nurse’s Red Cross costume who opened the door for the two men in uniform. They were not dressed like soldiers, and as she could not understand what they said, she did not dream of their errand.

But Sonya’s peasant servants must have understood, for at the sight of the strangers they dropped on their knees and held out imploring hands.

Sonya herself finally made things clear. The men were two police officers who had been sent to bring her to Petrograd. She had been in hiding here near Grovno for several months and had hoped to escape their vigilance. Evidently Sonya had been arrested by the Russian authorities.

In spite of Nona's insistence that her patient was not well enough to be moved, Sonya agreed to go with them at once.

And only at the moment of parting did she bestow any confidence upon the younger girl.

Then she looked deep into Nona's golden brown eyes with her own strangely glowing blue ones, and whispered:

"I have done nothing of which I am ashamed, Nona, or I should never have asked for your friendship. It may be that I can make the Russian people understand, but I do not feel sure. This war has made men blinder than ever. I have only tried to be a follower of the 'Prince of Peace.'"

Then after she had walked away a few steps she came back again.

"Go back to your United States as soon as you can, Nona," she urged. "Russia is no place for you or your friends."

Because Nona Davis dared not trust herself to speak, Sonya afterwards went away without a word of faith or farewell from her.

[Back to contents](#)

CHAPTER VII

A Russian Church

ONE afternoon, after Nona had been nursing her friend, Sonya Valesky, for some time, Mildred Thornton went alone into a little Russian church.

The church was situated behind the line of the fortifications at Grovno. Many years before it had been erected, and now it did not occur to the Russian officers that it stood in especial peril. Yet the church had the golden dome of all Russian churches, glittering like a ball of fire in the sun. Certainly it afforded an easy target for the enemy's guns, and more than this would aid German aeroplanists in making observations of the geography of the surrounding neighborhood. But since Grovno was deemed invincible, apparently no one considered the possibility of the other side to this question.

High cement walls guarded and mounted with cannon encircled the countryside for many miles, while running out from the fortress itself were numerous secret passages and cells, at present stored with ammunition.

On this afternoon of Mildred's visit to the church she stood outside for a few moments looking upward. At first she was merely admiring the beauty

of the little church. The gold of the dome seemed to be the one appealing spot of color in all the surrounding landscape. Then she opened the bronze doors and stole quietly inside.

Always the church was left open for prayer, but today on entering Mildred Thornton found it empty.

A Russian church is unlike all others except the Greek, for it is filled with brilliant colors. Instead of images such as the Roman Catholics use, the Russians have paintings dealing with the life of Christ, almost obscuring the ceiling and the walls. There are no pews such as we find in our own churches, for the Russian remains standing during his ceremony and kneels upon the stone floor in time of prayer. So one finds only a few chairs scattered about for old persons and ill ones.

Mildred secured a stool and sat down in the shadow, gazing up toward the high altar.

She was an Episcopalian, therefore the Russian church and its services did not seem so unusual to her as they did to Barbara Meade. Really she had been deeply impressed by the few services she had seen. There was no organ and no music save the intoning of the voices of the priests, and the words of the service she could not understand. Nevertheless the Russians were a deeply religious people and perhaps their reverence had influenced the American girl.

This afternoon, although alone, Mildred felt strangely at peace. Indeed, her eyes were cast down and her hands clasped in prayer, when the noise of some one else entering the church disturbed her reverie.

To the girl's surprise the figure was that of a man whom the next instant she recognized as General Alexis. He had come into the church without a member of his staff, so that evidently he too desired to be alone for prayer.

What should she do? Mildred was too confused to decide immediately. Feeling herself an intruder, yet she did not wish to create a stir and draw attention to herself by hastily leaving.

General Alexis had evidently not seen her, too intent upon his own devotions. For he had at once approached the altar and knelt reverently before it.

Mildred kept silent, hardly conscious of her own absorption and forgetting her meditations in her interest in the kneeling soldier.

In these days of little faith, small wonder that it struck Mildred as inspiring to see this man of many burdens and responsibilities at the foot of the altar.

From a western window the afternoon sun shone down upon him, revealing the weary lines in the great soldier's face. He did not look stern or forbidding to Mildred this afternoon, only deeply careworn and depressed. However much his soldiers and the Russian people might trust in his power to bring them safely through an attack at Grovno, evidently there were hours when the distinguished general suffered like lesser people. Mildred Thornton understood enough of human nature to realize what General Alexis must at this moment be enduring. The fate of a people, of a nation, almost of half the world, in a measure rested in his hands. How inadequate any mortal must feel in the face of such a task!

By and by Mildred's eyes dropped their lids. She felt that she was seeing too deeply into the holy of holies of the man before her. This would not be just to any human being, unaware of her presence. If only she could get away without disturbing him! Doubtless on discovering her General Alexis would be angered, or at any rate annoyed, perhaps he might even consider her behavior as characteristic American intrusion.

Once Mildred started to her feet, but she did not try to move again, for at almost the same instant the Russian general rose from his knees.

His face had become a little less careworn than at the moment of his entrance; his blue eyes, which were remarkable with his other Russian coloring, were less sombre. Since he did not appear to observe her, Mildred was glad for this last glance at her companion.

Since their one meeting for some reason he had haunted her thoughts more than she could explain. This was partly due to the fact that he was so much talked of at the fortress and so idolized by his soldiers. He was said to be without fear, or any human weakness, but after today Mildred Thornton knew better than this.

Unconsciously the girl must have moved or made a sound of some kind at this instant, for General Alexis, who had almost reached the door, turned quickly around. At the same time his right hand grasped his pistol.

Was there a spy or an assassin lurking in his church to destroy him? There were many men of other lands who would gladly give their lives for his.

But General Alexis' hand dropped to his side again, as soon as it had touched the metal of his pistol. To his surprise he had discovered a pair of

blue-gray eyes staring at him earnestly, with almost wistful sympathy.

General Alexis came back to where Mildred stood.

“You were here in church with me and I did not see you,” he said as simply and naturally as an ordinary person, “I hope I did not disturb you.”

“*Disturb me!*” Mildred stuttered a little in her surprise at his words. “Oh, I beg your pardon, it was I who should not have been here when you came. But I did not know, that is I did not dream you ever left the fort, while I like to steal in here during the hours I have for rest. I will not come again.”

General Alexis shook his head. “I should be very sorry. Rather than that this should happen I would stay away during those hours. But is there not room enough here and peace enough for us both?”

Without replying Mildred inclined her head and began walking toward the door, General Alexis keeping beside her.

“If you are returning to the fortress and will permit me, I should like to go back with you?” he asked.

And again Mildred could only stammer a confused acquiescence.

In the little court before the Russian church General Alexis’ guard of soldiers was awaiting him. However, at an inclination of his head they fell in at once, marching at a respectful distance behind their general and his companion.

“I remember our having a short conversation a few weeks ago,” the Russian officer continued gravely, after they had gone on a few yards.

Mildred had been vainly endeavoring to make up her mind whether she should be the one to speak. If so, what on earth should she say?

She was glad to be spared having to make up her mind.

“You were very kind,” the girl returned. “I did not imagine you would know me again, but perhaps it is because I am an American.”

Just as if he had been a young man and an everyday one, General Alexis smiled, and Mildred was no longer afraid of him.

“Oh, I may remember you, Miss Thornton, for other reasons. But to be truthful it is because you are an American that I am taking this opportunity to talk to you again.”

This time the Russian officer hesitated.

“You will not mention what I am going to say to any persons except your two American friends,” he added, not as a request, but as a command.

“Miss Thornton, as soon as it is possible for convenient arrangements to be made for you I want you to know that I intend having you sent back to Petrograd. You must of course have a safe escort or I should have seen to the matter sooner.”

Ordinarily Mildred Thornton possessed unusual self-control, but the surprise, indeed, the shock of the speech, took her unawares.

She had not dreamed that she and Barbara and Nona had been such complete failures in their Red Cross work. Why, after their several years of war experience they had felt themselves of perhaps unusual value in the Russian nursing. So far as she knew there had been no complaints of their

work, only praise. But in any case how could their failures have reached General Dmitri Alexis' ears? It seemed incredible that he should ever be annoyed with such trifling concerns.

"Just as you wish," Mildred answered quietly, yet with greater personal dignity than any one of the other American Red Cross girls could have summoned. "We have done our best to help with the nursing. If we have failed it is, of course, wisest that we should return to Petrograd. Afterwards we can go home to the United States."

"Failed in your nursing? And it is for that reason you believe I wish to have you sent away from my fortress?"

Actually General Alexis stopped in his walk and faced his companion, since Mildred was, of course, obliged to stop also.

"That is folly. I know nothing of your nursing. But from your face, from a something, a serenity and strength that your presence suggests, I feel that you must understand and love your profession."

General Alexis was now studying Mildred Thornton with surprising intentness, as though he were trying in this moment of their acquaintance to pierce beneath the surface of the girl before him. This was characteristic of the man. No human being was ever too small or too unimportant for his consideration. He was a strange combination: a great soldier and yet one of the gentlest of men.

"I want you to go back to Petrograd because I fear for your safety and the safety of your friends should you remain much longer at Grovno," he continued. "It is of this fact you are not to speak. I have reason to know that at almost any hour in the next few days we may expect the German attack.

Grovno will resist to the uttermost. But it may be that the old fortifications are not so invincible as we once thought them to be. A new war has brought a new world and the old order changeth.”

Once again Mildred saw beneath the outer surface of the man, but almost at once he was again the soldier.

“You understand that I do not expect this. If I decide it may be wiser to retreat, it will only be to form a conjunction with another part of Grand Duke Nicholas’ army. But in any case I should prefer to have you three American nurses away from all possible danger. The Russian nurses will share the fate of their own soldiers. Be prepared to leave within a few days. When the necessary arrangements are made you will receive instructions.”

Then before Mildred could protest, and she had scarcely the courage for this, they had reached the gate of the fortress.

Here General Alexis bowed and waited for his guard to come up with him. Mildred could feel the surprise even of the sentries at the gate and the few soldiers who chanced to be near at their unexpected appearance. Truly it was amazing that the great commander should be concerned with the fate of three unimportant American girls, and even more amazing that he should actually show his consideration and friendliness to one of them!

[Back to contents](#)

CHAPTER VIII

Another Warning

TWO hours after Sonya Valesky had been taken away by the Russian police Nona Davis started back for the Russian fortress.

Only a few moments were required to pack her own belongings, since the little house and everything inside it had been fumigated as soon as Sonya reached a state of convalescence. Nona's time had been spent in trying to comfort Sonya's servants, old Katja and Nika, and also in trying to acquire some information from them.

In neither effort was she successful. Either the old man and woman knew nothing of Sonya's actions, or else they were too grief-stricken to confide their knowledge. There was also the third possibility that Sonya had warned them against betraying her to any human being. Whatever the reason, they were dumb, except for their half-broken Russian prayers and stories of Sonya as a little girl. If she had not long ago been fully aware of the fact, Nona was now assured that the two peasants had been former servants of the Russian woman. It was Sonya who would not recognize the distinctions of maid and mistress, who called herself by no title and would allow her servants to call her by none.

Therefore it was almost night when Nona left the little hut, old Nika carrying her bag and plodding behind her. The girl felt that she must return to her two American friends to receive their aid and sympathy.

Surely something could be done for Sonya, it was horrible to think of her being carried off to a Russian prison, concerning which one had read such dreadful stories. She was too ill and she seemed so utterly without friends or relatives. Yet Nona herself was utterly powerless, knowing no one with any influence in Russia. Nevertheless she felt a strange bond, which had come to her out of the past, between herself and Sonya Valesky.

One person, however, might be willing to give her advice, though she doubted his help. In returning to the fort, Nona meant as soon as possible to request an interview with the young Russian officer, Michael Orlaff.

She was not frightened during her walk through the dismal Russian country. Wearing her Red Cross uniform she felt a sufficient protection, besides old Nika's presence. But the real truth is she was too absorbed in considering Sonya's history and fate to be aware of anything else.

She was therefore more annoyed than frightened when a figure appeared before her at the crossing of the road by the Three Pines. The voice that straightway called out to them held a quality of command that made Nika drop at once on his knees. Nona was not in the least frightened, but then she had seen the outline of the young officer's figure and the glistening of his sword hilt.

"I am Nona Davis, an American Red Cross nurse on my way back to the fortress, Lieutenant Orlaff," the girl explained. "I am glad to have met you, as perhaps you will tell me what I must do when I reach the gate."

The Russian officer saluted as though Nona had been a superior officer.

“I was on my way at the present moment to Sonya Valesky’s home to inquire for her. This is the first hour of freedom I have been able to command all day. But tell me what brings you back to the fortress at this time? Has Sonya grown worse or is she better?”

Here was her opportunity. Nona felt that fate must have sent it to her by a special dispensation. Now there need be no delay in her confidence.

Lieutenant Orlaff came of a noble family, he must have powerful connections, if he could only be persuaded to use them in Sonya’s behalf. Certainly he had appeared to be her friend, although disapproving of her behavior and views of life.

As sympathetically and as quickly as possible Nona told of the coming of the Russian police. Then she laid great stress on the fact that Sonya was too ill to have been taken away at such a time. Yet she had gone without resistance, making no plea for herself and asking for no aid. What must *they* do? The situation was unendurable.

Intentionally Nona used the pronoun “they,” including Lieutenant Orlaff with herself in their interest in Sonya. Yet except for his first muttered exclamation the Russian officer had made no comment.

In the darkness Nona gazed at him resentfully. The Russians were a cruel people, sometimes all fire and then again all ice. She would like to have told him what an American man would have attempted for a friend, who was a woman and in such a tragic position, no matter what her crime or mistake. But Nona was sure by this time that Sonya Valesky had committed no crime. She had come to know her too well, her exquisite gentleness, so

oddly combined with a blind determination that took no thought of self. Besides she recalled her friend's final words, "a follower of the Prince of Peace." Surely there were but few such followers in the European world today!

Awaiting his answer, Nona continued to look at her companion. The young Russian might have stood for the figure of "Mars," the young god of war, as he strode along beside her. He was six feet in height, splendidly made, and tonight in the semi-darkness his face showed hard and unmoved.

"I am grieved but not surprised at what you tell me," he returned the next moment. "Not a hundred, but a thousand times I have warned Sonya that she must give up her mad ideas. There was sufficient danger in them when the world was at peace. Now in time of war to preach that men are brothers, that there should be no such thing as patriotism, that all men are kin, no matter what their country, there never was such folly. It is hard to feel pity or patience."

"Then you will do nothing to help?" Nona inquired, trying to hide the anger she felt. "Of course I understand that from your point of view and from the view of nearly all the world Sonya Valesky is hopelessly wrong. But I can't see why she should be punished because she has a higher ideal than other people?"

If Nona had only thought for a moment she would have realized that the world has always thus rewarded its visionaries.

"But Sonya is not content to think in this way alone. She has spent her life in trying to persuade other persons to her view, and has many followers. Once she was a very rich woman and traveled in many lands preaching her universal brotherhood," the young officer ended his speech with a

characteristic shrug of his shoulders, which is the Oriental fashion of announcing that fate is stronger than one's will.

“To have continued advocating such a doctrine in a time of war was worse than madness. I have done what I could, I have even risked my own honor and safety in remaining Sonya's friend. Now retribution has come,” he concluded, as though the subject was not to be resumed.

And Nona did not reply at once. So the young Russian officer and the American girl walked on toward the fortress through darkness that was each moment growing more dense. There were no lights save the stars, since the fortress was only dimly lighted in the interior; outside lights would too plainly have exposed their position to the enemy.

“What then do you think will become of Sonya? What punishment will she have to suffer?” Nona inquired when she felt that she had gotten her voice under control.

“Siberia,” Lieutenant Orlaff returned briefly. Then feeling that his companion desired him to say more, he went on:

“In many cases a man or woman who has done what Sonya Valesky has would be hung as a traitor. She has been preaching peace, which means she has been urging men not to fight. That is treason to Russia. But I believe that Sonya will be lightly dealt with because she comes of a family that once served the Czar and his father. Besides, Sonya is a woman and a beautiful one and it would not do to make a martyr of her.”

“Then you think Siberia a light punishment?” Nona questioned, no longer trying to keep the bitterness out of her tones. “Well, surely you accept a friend's misfortune easily! I have not your philosophy. I do not

think I can do much, as I have no friends in Russia and no money, but as soon as I receive permission I shall go to Petrograd to be of whatever service I can.”

Lieutenant Orlaff stared at the girl beside him. It was impossible to see anything but the outline of her face, yet he could observe its pallor and the sheen of her hair under the nurse’s cap. Besides, he felt the contempt she had not allowed herself to express, for the Russian is singularly proud and sensitive.

“I repeat that I am very sorry,” the young officer added. “You are wrong in thinking I take Sonya Valesky’s fate lightly. Her family and mine, as I once told you, have been friends for many years. After the death of her parents my father was for a little time her guardian until she came of age. I will do what I can; I will write letters to her relatives and to people who were once her friends. But I warn you to expect nothing. Long ago they became weary of her wild theories and have had nothing to do with her for years.”

“Then all the more reason why I should do what I can. Even if I accomplish nothing, at least Sonya will have the comfort of knowing that a friend is near her during her trial,” the girl said aloud, although really not addressing her companion.

During the latter part of his speech she had been thinking very rapidly. First of all, she must ask for a leave of absence from her Red Cross nursing and explain that it was necessary for her to return to Petrograd for a time. But where was she to obtain the money for her expenses? She had nothing of her own except the few roubles which she was paid for her work and which she had forfeited when she undertook to care for Sonya Valesky. In all probability when Mildred Thornton knew her mission she could borrow

the money from her. But then this would mean a delay so long that she might be of no service to Sonya. For Mildred kept only a small amount of extra money with her and would be compelled to write her father for any large sum. Weeks would pass before Judge Thornton could receive his daughter's request and then there would be more time required for the transmission of the check.

However, besides Mildred there was Eugenia who could be appealed to for aid. There was no doubt of Eugenia's assistance, once she learned Sonya Valesky's story and realized why she had seemed a suspicious character to all of them in the days of their meeting on board the "Philadelphia." But Eugenia was away off somewhere in France nursing in a Red Cross hospital near her husband's line of trenches. It would also take time to reach Eugenia. Nevertheless she was the best person to whom to make a request.

"But what connection have you with Sonya Valesky? Why should you not be willing to leave her to her fate?" Lieutenant Orlaff had to ask the second time before Nona heard him. "You have done what you could in nursing her through a dangerous illness; friendship could expect nothing more. Besides, you are an American girl and can have only a slight acquaintance with Sonya."

Again Nona Davis did not reply immediately. How much or how little should she take the Russian officer into her confidence? However, it did not seem to her of much importance then.

"You are mistaken. I am not simply an American girl," Nona explained quietly. "My father was an American, but my mother was a Russian. She and Sonya Valesky knew each other as girls, although my mother was the older. There is a stronger tie between us than you imagine. And I have

reason to believe that my mother once thought as Sonya does about many things.”

“Your mother, impossible!” Michael Orlaff exclaimed, with more consternation and regret in his voice than was reasonable. “But you, surely you cherish no such ideas?”

The American girl shook her head, although she seemed to be pondering over her companion’s question before replying.

“No,” she returned at last. “I have no such ideas and I believe never will have them. Even though my mother was a Russian, I am an American in all my feelings and instincts and training. Russia fascinates me, but it frightens me at the same time. Besides, it is not necessary in our country that we should teach peace and equality, because it is in those two principles that the American people most believe. If Sonya is released I mean to try and take her back to the United States with me to remain until the war is over.”

“But Sonya will not be released, I have tried to make you understand,” Lieutenant Orlaff added doggedly. “What is one woman more or less in times like these? Go to Petrograd if you will, Miss Davis. I have told you it is not wise for you and your friends to remain at Grovno. But when you reach Petrograd have nothing to do with Sonya Valesky. I have known you only a short time, yet I am your friend and I warn you. Cannot you see that I care very much what becomes of you? You are a guest in my country; you have come to do us a service. It would be a poor return if trouble overtook you.”

Nona and Lieutenant Orlaff with old Nika hobbling behind them had by this time about reached the entrance to the fortress. Nona was truly grateful. She was very tired and depressed from the day’s experiences. Moreover, she

did not understand the manner or the words of the young officer beside her. At one moment he seemed extraordinarily hard and at the next unnecessarily concerned. Nothing could happen to her in Petrograd of a serious character, but in any case her experiences could not interest Lieutenant Orlaff.

As soon as possible Nona said good-by to him. Later, in recalling their conversation, she often thought of a phrase he used: “What is one woman more or less in times like these?”

[Back to contents](#)

CHAPTER IX

The Attack

THERE was a great deal more for the three American Red Cross girls to confide to one another than they could find time for, soon after Nona Davis' return to the fortress.

But two evenings later it chanced that the three girls were all on day duty and therefore had the same evening and night free.

In the left wing of the fortress, near the hospital quarters, was the single, small bedroom which the three American nurses shared. Once before Nona had discovered Barbara Meade rereading one of Dick Thornton's letters and giving way to the blues in their small, cold chamber. This evening she made the discovery a second time.

It chanced that Barbara had gotten away from her nursing first and hurried off to the only privacy that was possible under the circumstances. Because she was looking forward to a long and serious conversation with her two friends she made ready to meet the situation as comfortably as possible. This means that Barbara slipped out of her nursing uniform and into the pretty kimono that Mildred had presented her with long ago in

Paris. Then, while she waited for the others, she read Dick's and Eugenia's latest letters once again.

At last Dick had arrived in New York City and was writing from the lovely home Barbara remembered so well. He had only been there a little while when this letter had been written, but already Dick had confided the news of his engagement to his mother and father.

Barbara could read between the lines in a characteristic feminine fashion. Dick declared that his father was delighted to hear of his happiness and that he had not forgotten that they probably owed their son's life to the girl to whom he was now engaged.

But Judge Thornton agreed with his son—a man should be able to support his wife before he married. Therefore he meant to do all that he could to get Dick started in the right way, so that he might go ahead as quickly as possible.

Dick did not seem to feel that it would take very long to accomplish this delectable result, but to Barbara, away off in Russia, a land she both disliked and feared, the situation looked pretty indefinite.

Moreover, Dick had said nothing about the way in which his mother had received the news of a prospective daughter-in-law. This was not an oversight on Dick's part; Barbara understood him too well to be deceived into any such impression. He and his mother were too intimate and devoted for him not to care intensely about her attitude toward the girl he wished to marry. Never could he have forgotten to mention his mother's position! No, it was merely what she had always expected. Mrs. Thornton thoroughly disapproved of her son's engagement and Dick would not wound the girl he loved by writing her this fact. Later there was a chance that his mother

might be persuaded to change her mind. But in any case it would be easier to explain by word of mouth than coldly to set down the present situation.

Moreover, if Barbara had required further proof, she would have had it in the fact that Mrs. Thornton had not written her a single line to say either that she was glad or sorry that the daughter of her husband's old friend had become engaged to her only son. If she had spoken of the matter to Mildred, Mildred had never referred to it, proving again that any comment from Mrs. Thornton must have been unfavorable.

While she made these reflections following the rereading of her fiancé's letter, Barbara was lying on her cot-bed with an army blanket drawn close up under her chin. Now she buried her curly head deeper in her pillow and turned from Dick's to Eugenia's letter.

It was difficult to think of Eugenia Peabody as Madame Castaigne, indeed as the Countess Castaigne, only neither she nor her husband would ever be induced to use their titles. The old Countess might always remain in safe possession of hers.

Barbara wondered if Eugenia was happier than she was. Then she felt ashamed of herself. Eugenia's husband was every instant in danger of losing his life, while Dick had only returned to the United States, where he was now safe in his own home. Yet Eugenia's letter made no complaints. She mentioned having seen Captain Castaigne once in the past month, when he had received a leave of absence of twenty-four hours and had hurried to her.

No, Eugenia's letter was chiefly devoted, as all her previous letters had been, to her interest and concern in the three American Red Cross girls. She wished them to return immediately to France and to the old chateau, where the Countess Castaigne would be only too happy to shelter them. Later, if

they wished, they could find other Red Cross work to do in France. But Russia was not a country where the girls should have gone at this time, and certainly not without her to look after them. Moreover, the news from the Russian lines grew more and more alarming. Everywhere the Germans seemed to be conquering. It was disheartening after the Russian triumphs at the beginning of the war. The letter closed with a final plea: would Barbara do her best to persuade Nona and Mildred that they should as soon as possible come back to France. There would be no cowardice or desertion of duty in leaving Russia at present, only discretion and good sense.

And upon this point of view Barbara was reflecting when Nona found her.

Personally Barbara agreed with Eugenia and wished that Nona and Mildred would join her in withdrawing from Russia whenever they could best be spared. But she could not decide whether she ought to thrust her point of view upon her friends since she was uncertain whether her judgment or her desire most swayed her.

France would be so much nearer New York and therefore Dick's letters could be so much more frequent. Then there was the Countess Castaigne, to whom she could pour out all her heartburnings. Moreover, there was the chance of every now and then seeing her beloved Eugenia.

But Barbara also remembered that she had always been the least brave and determined of the four American nurses ever since their arrival in Europe. Should she reveal herself in the selfsame light again?

At this instant Nona snuggled under the blanket beside the younger girl.

The Russian winter was fast approaching and frequently it was bitterly cold. Besides, there were no chairs in the Red Cross girls' bedroom, only the three beds and some stools, so it was simpler to lie down than be seated.

"I have a long story to tell you, Bab, and I want your advice, only I think we had best wait for Mildred, so you may not have to hear everything twice," Nona began.

"You mean about Sonya Valesky?" Barbara queried. Of course Nona had told her two friends of Sonya's arrest, but had not been able to go into the details of the story, nor had she mentioned her own intentions. Very possibly both the girls would disapprove, as Lieutenant Orlaff had done, of her becoming more closely involved with Sonya Valesky's history.

Fortunately Mildred appeared at the door without further delay.

But when she entered the room, both of her companions could see that she also had something of importance upon her mind which she wished to discuss at once.

Instead of lying down, Mildred immediately seated herself upon the edge of her cot, facing her friends. Then she drew her own blanket up around her shoulders.

"Girls," she began, "I don't usually do the talking, but I want both of you to listen to me for a few moments tonight. I have been trying to speak of this for several days, and if I don't tell you now the order may come when you are wholly unprepared. We are to be sent back to Petrograd as soon as a safe escort can be found for us."

“Sent back to Petrograd! Thank fate for even so much!” Barbara whispered under the cover. “Petrograd might be the beginning of a return journey to France.”

Then she drew her chin up, endeavoring to appear deeply wounded.

“Do you mean, Mildred, that our services as Red Cross nurses are not considered valuable?” she demanded. “Why, only today one of the Russian surgeons declared that it was difficult to decide which one of us did the best work. Of course, I think Mildred at present deserves the prize, Nona has been off duty so long in taking care of Sonya Valesky.”

Mildred Thornton glanced from one girl’s face to the other. In spite of Barbara’s effort to conceal her pleasure, it was evident that she was secretly rejoicing. But Mildred understood Barbara’s position; it was natural that she should feel as she did under the circumstances. Then Barbara had never put forth any claims to being a martyr.

What really surprised Mildred Thornton was Nona Davis’ expression of relief, almost of pleasure, at her news.

Why, Nona had been more enthusiastic than any one of them over the Red Cross nursing in Russia! She it was who had originally planned their coming into Russia and had been most deeply interested since their arrival.

“But why are we to be sent back to Petrograd?” Nona also demanded, frowning a little in her effort to grasp the situation. “What reason was given; have we failed in any duty or service since our arrival at Grovno?” Nona went on, sitting up, while two spots of color appeared in her cheeks. “Please, Mildred, don’t be mysterious. Tell us where you received your information and why we are to be sent away so ignominiously?”

Mildred Thornton shook her head in quiet reproach. She was not so impatient nor so unreasonable as the other two girls.

“I am waiting to tell you,” she returned. “The other afternoon I was sitting alone in the little Russian church when General Dmitri Alexis came in. On leaving he chanced to discover me and asked me to walk with him for a few moments. You know I told you I had met him the day he came into my hospital ward to decorate the dying soldier?” Mildred added.

This time her companions only nodded, not wishing to interrupt.

“Well, it was General Alexis himself who said that he wished us to go back to Petrograd. It was not that he felt the fortress at Grovno would not be able to hold out against the German attacks, but that a soldier should be prepared for any emergency. In case Grovno should fall, or General Alexis decide it wiser to retreat and join another portion of Grand Duke Nicholas’ army, he does not wish us at Grovno. He says that the Russian Red Cross nurses have the right to remain with their own soldiers, but that we are Americans and with us the circumstances are different. He does not intend that harm shall befall us. So I am afraid we have no choice in the matter. As soon as the order comes from General Alexis we must be ready to leave at once. One can scarcely dare disobey the commander in chief,” Mildred concluded, with regret in her tones.

“Certainly not,” Barbara added with emphasis.

Then for another moment Nona Davis continued gazing thoughtfully at Mildred.

“I suppose I ought to tell you, Mildred, you and Barbara both, that I am not sorry we are to go to Petrograd; indeed, I am truly glad. Because I had

intended to try to get permission to return there alone. You know I told you of Sonya's arrest, but I did not tell you that I intend to do all that I possibly can to befriend her. She seems to have no one who cares what becomes of her so far as I can find out, except her two old servants, Katja and Nika. I may not be able to do much, but I have written Eugenia, asking her to lend me some money and to forward it to the American Ambassador at Petrograd as soon as possible. I would like to leave almost at once. You see, I don't know what has become of Sonya, nor when her trial may take place."

"And for my part I hope you may never know," Barbara protested, sitting up with her cheeks suddenly crimson and her hair much tousled.

"See here, girls, I know neither of you think much of my advice, and very probably you don't consider me especially brave. I'm not disputing the last point. But I am more sensible than either of you and I can see both sides of a situation better. Mildred is an idealist, and Nona, you are a dreamer. You think you are not, but I expect you have more of your mother's blood in you than you realize. I am desperately sorry for Sonya Valesky. I think she is an exquisite and much-wronged woman with the courage and devotion necessary to a martyr. But I don't see that you are particularly fitted to follow her example, Nona. That is all that would happen if you attempt to mix yourself up with Sonya Valesky's political fortunes in Petrograd. You have no important friends and could do absolutely nothing for her, but you might manage to get yourself and us, because we care for you, into a great deal of hot water."

Mildred began to undress.

"I think Bab is right, Nona, though I understand just how you feel. It does seem too cruel to desert a friend in a time of such extremity. When we get to Petrograd perhaps we can talk Sonya Valesky's case over with our

Ambassador and he may help us with his advice. Let's get to sleep now; we can judge more wisely in the morning."

It was too cold for a leisurely disrobing, so in a very short time the three girls were ready for the night. Soon after they were asleep.

For many hours, lasting all through the darkness, the fortress at Grovno appeared wrapped in a profound silence. This in spite of the presence of many thousands of men without and within its gates. Now and then there may have been the faint noise of a sentry changing his watch, or a scout arriving with a report for headquarters.

It was just at dawn when the German attack began. But the Russian general had been warned and was awaiting it.

Never in all the grim history of war was there ever a more sudden or more terrific cannonading.

The three American girls were at first stunned by the unexpected noises of the explosions. Shell after shell shrieked over the walls of the fortress, cannon after cannon repeated an unceasing bombardment.

Neither were the Russian guns slow in replying. Except for the location of the sounds it was impossible to tell which were the Russian cannon and which those of the enemy.

For some time no one of the three American girls attempted to speak. It would have been impossible to have heard one another. But by and by Barbara crawled out of her cot and put her arm about Mildred Thornton.

“I am frightened, Mildred. I wish your General’s order had come sooner and we were safely away from Grovno. I think perhaps because of Dick I don’t want anything dreadful to happen. I want to be happy.”

There was a sob in Barbara's voice which Mildred heard, if not with her ears, at least with her heart.

"It is going to be all right, little sister," she returned. "I can't explain exactly why, but I have perfect faith in General Alexis."

[Back to contents](#)

CHAPTER X

Mildred's Opportunity

FOR five days and nights the firing continued almost without cessation.

In a measure the occupants of the Russian fortress grew accustomed to the noises, unless one explosion seemed a little more terrific than the others.

Actually the Red Cross nurses went about their work inside the hospital wing of the fort as though the Germans were not attacking.

There was one fact, however, that could not be overlooked: more and more wounded were constantly being brought in, until not only the cots but most of the floor space of the wards were covered with stricken soldiers.

There was no definite news. No one could say whether the Germans had been seriously depleted by the Russian gun fire, or whether the Grovno fort would be able to continue its resistance. A few of the outer defenses had already fallen. The Russian soldiers in the trenches behind the first line of barricades had sought safety inside the fortress. But these signs meant nothing of moment, and no one dared ask questions of the Russian officers, who alone might know the purpose of their commander.

Then on the morning of the seventh day, at dawn, Mildred Thornton, who chanced to be gazing out of a small window which overlooked the courtyard of the fort, made a discovery.

She had not been asleep all night, as there was so much work to be done, but on the way to her room had stopped for a single breath of fresh air, after the fever and confusion of the hospital.

What she saw were enormous cannon being lifted on low motor trucks and these trucks being driven as swiftly as possible outside the Grovno gate and along the Russian highway. There were a few soldiers accompanying them.

Almost with the flash of an intuition the idea came to Mildred: General Alexis was contemplating a retreat. He must have decided that, alone and with only a limited number of regiments at his command, he would be unable to hold out against the enemy for an unlimited time. Therefore it might be wiser to draw them further into Russia and away from their own supplies. General Alexis could join Grand Duke Nicholas beyond the Styr River and there be better prepared to meet the invaders. Mildred knew that the country on the other side of the river covered miles of swamps. If the bridges over the river were destroyed, the Germans would find great difficulty in pursuit.

Therefore the cannon and other heavy guns, with whatever munitions could be spared, were first to be taken to places of safety. Later on General Alexis would probably give orders for a more general retreat. But when Grovno fell the Germans would find none of the spoils of war left behind for the victors.

All this Mildred thought out slowly and carefully as she stood for a few moments beside the tiny window. Then she went into her room, changed her uniform for a fresher one and returned to her work. Not a word of her idea did she breathe to any one. She had no foundation for her impression, and at first it was an impression, nothing more. Yet Barbara or Nona might have been frightened by the suggestion.

However, as the dawn passed and the hours of the day followed, other persons beside Mildred Thornton began dimly to appreciate the possible conditions. More and more of the munitions of war were hauled away, and surely this did not look as if the fight were to be persisted in at Grovno.

Finally, just before twilight the order came that the wounded, with their nurses and surgeons, were to be moved at nightfall. Whatever preparations were necessary must be made at once.

Silently small groups of soldiers were already being marched away.

Oh, of course the old guns of the famous fortress continued to belch forth destruction, and there was no lessening of the front ranks of soldiers, who were directly attacking the enemy. General Alexis was merely drawing off the men whom he did not actually need for defense. Grovno could be protected by a comparatively small number of soldiers without the enemy appreciating any depreciation in their numbers. For all the firing was done behind a barricade of walls. So far the Germans were about a mile away. There would be no hand-to-hand combats until the fortress was finally demolished.

Even under such dangerous conditions the American Red Cross girls were relieved to hear that they were to be sent from Grovno. They were also told that they were not to follow the army. As soon as they reached a

railroad, the wounded and their nurses were to be removed to Petrograd. There they would find hospitals ready for their accommodation.

So it was to be Petrograd after all! The three girls were not seriously frightened; indeed, they were less so than at the time of the French retreat. It was so evident that General Alexis was providing for the safety of the wounded before the danger time. They would find all the roads open to them now, while the Germans were being held on the farther side of the ancient stone walls.

Just after dusk the hospital staff and their patients were ready for departure. Parties of ten, consisting of seven wounded soldiers, two nurses and a physician, gathered quietly in the stone courtyard enclosed by the wings of the fortress. They were then placed in low carts, drawn by gaunt horses and driven by a Russian moujik, wearing a long blouse, high boots and a cap with the peculiar Russian peak.

There were no such facilities for transportation in Russia as the American Red Cross girls had found in France. The motor cars and ambulances owned by the Russian army were few in number and inadequate to their needs. These could only be employed in cases where swiftness was a pressing necessity.

The three American girls were standing together just outside a stone doorway leading into the yard and awaiting orders. As a matter of course they wore their Red Cross uniforms: the long circular cape and the small close-fitting bonnet. But Barbara had also put on nearly everything else she possessed. They would be traveling all night under extremely uncomfortable conditions and through a bitterly cold country. In fact, Barbara looked rather like a little “Mother Bunch” with her squirrel fur coat

on top of her sweater and her cape over them both, and carrying her army blanket.

Mildred was also prepared for the cold with a heavy coat under her uniform cape. Unfortunately, Nona owned nothing to make her more comfortable, except that Mildred had insisted upon lending her her sweater. But both girls had their blankets over their arms and small bags in their hands. There would be no room for other luggage.

“We are going to have a wonderful night, I think,” Barbara murmured. “Of course it will be hard and we may have to suffer discomfort and see others suffering far worse things. But a retreat through this strange country, with its odd inhabitants, as unlike as if they belonged in different planets, will be an experience none of us will ever wish to forget.”

It was curious that Barbara should almost whisper her little speech, as if her voice could be heard above the uproar of the cannonading. Yet in the pauses between the firing lasting a few moments the silence seemed almost unearthly.

At present there was just such a silence, so that the American girls could even hear the creaking of the old wagon wheels as the ambulance carts rolled out of the fortress yard. Now and then there was a faint groan from a wounded man that could not be repressed. The wagons had no springs, but were made as comfortable as possible by layers of hay covering the wagon floors.

Almost the moment that Barbara’s speech was finished, some one suddenly stepped out of the door, near which the three girls were standing. Looking up they discovered a colonel in the Russian army, on the personal staff of General Alexis. No one of the three girls knew the officer’s name;

his rank they recognized from the uniform he wore. Moreover, they had observed him always accompanying the Russian commander as one of his chief aides.

His appearance in the courtyard at this moment was surprising, but in all probability he wished to issue a direct order concerning the plan of retreat.

Yet the officer did not at once move forward to where groups of soldiers were also making preparations to be on the march. Instead he stood for a few moments just outside the door, gazing searchingly about him.

No one of the Red Cross girls spoke. They were too awed by the gravity of the situation to make trivial remarks. Moreover, the big Russian officer was an impressive figure. It was more interesting to watch him until they were summoned to take their places in the wagons that were now leaving the fortress at intervals of about ten minutes apart.

By chance Mildred Thornton made a movement and immediately the Russian colonel directed his glance toward her. He stared at her for a moment in silence and then, stepping forward, touched her upon the arm.

"I should like to speak to you a moment alone, nurse," he announced in low tones, although Barbara and Nona both heard this part of his speech.

Instantly Mildred complied, and the girl and man moved a few feet away, where they could talk without being overheard.

Under the circumstances neither Barbara nor Nona had the temerity to follow them. But this did not mean that they were not both extraordinarily curious. At least they strained their ears as much as possible in order to try and catch a stray word spoken either by Mildred or her companion. But they

heard nothing except the low murmur of the two voices, the officer asking questions and Mildred making replies.

“What on earth do you suppose he can be saying to Mill?” Barbara finally whispered.

Nona only shook her head. Any guessing would be a pure waste of energy, since Mildred would return in a few moments to explain.

She did come back almost immediately, but with her first words her friends realized that something unusual had occurred. Ordinarily Mildred was calm and self possessed. Now her voice shook and indeed she seemed to be shivering either from cold or excitement.

“I can’t go with you to Petrograd, girls,” she said quietly enough, however. “Listen, please, so I can make matters plain to you, for you may be ordered to leave at any moment. Barbara, I want you to write my father and mother and try and make them see I had no choice in this decision. But you must not speak of the circumstances to any one else. It would be dangerous for me and for us all if you betray this confidence. The officer who talked with me just then is Colonel Feodorovitch. He is very near General Alexis and tells me that General Alexis has been wounded. The wound is not considered serious and he refuses to give up his command or to leave the fort until the final moment for retreat. Neither must his soldiers learn of what has taken place. His own surgeon is with him now and will remain with him. But there is a chance that they will also require a nurse. Colonel Feodorovitch came to find one before we all got away. By accident he saw me first and requested me to remain behind. I could not refuse.”

“Mildred!” Nona and Barbara exclaimed in unison, with no attempt to conceal their dismay, almost their horror.

“But you can’t accept, Mildred,” Barbara expostulated. “If you do I shall not leave you. Why, what would your mother and father and Dick think of my deserting you at such a time? Besides, don’t you remember that General Alexis himself wanted us safe in Petrograd before the retreat. He would be bitterly opposed to your being chosen to remain behind. Didn’t you speak of this to Colonel Feodorovitch?”

“I couldn’t, Barbara,” Mildred insisted. “It would have been such a long story and Colonel Feodorovitch knows about as much English as I do Russian. It would only have looked as though I were shirking a most important duty. General Alexis will not recall ever having thought or spoken to me, at a time when the Russian army, perhaps the whole Russian nation, is dependent on his failure or success. If I can do even the least thing to help him at such a crisis, why, how could I refuse? Please try and see this as I do, Barbara, you and Nona. There may be nothing for me to do. General Alexis’ wound is not serious or he could not retain his command. I must leave you now; I am wanted at once. I’ll join you in Petrograd as soon as it is humanly possible.”

But Barbara had clutched Mildred’s coat.

“You shall not stay alone. I am almost your sister and I won’t allow it.”

Quietly Mildred unclasped the younger girl’s hand.

“For my own sake I would give a great deal to have you stay, Bab, but we have no choice. Remember, we are under discipline like soldiers. We must do as we are commanded.”

With this Mildred returned inside the fortress.

At the same instant Nona Davis and Barbara Meade heard their names being called. At once they moved forward and were assisted inside the wagon, which soon after passed out of the gate and moved creakingly along the main road in the direction of the Styr River.

They were to cross one of its bridges, as the main army was now doing. The last of the regiments at Grovno would see that the bridges were destroyed before the German soldiers could come up to them.

[Back to contents](#)

CHAPTER XI

A Russian Retreat

FOR many hours the ambulance wagon in which Nona and Barbara were riding jogged on, forming one of a procession of similar wagons.

The girls grew cold and cramped. Now and then they tried to move in order to make their patients more comfortable or at least to give water to the wounded men. But the wagons were so crowded that the slightest stirring was well nigh impossible.

Nevertheless, as Barbara Meade had predicted, the long night was one neither she nor Nona would ever be willing to forget.

At first they rode along, passing the wooden huts of the peasants that once had lined both sides of the main road leading to the middle bridge across the river Styr. But many of these shacks had suffered from the stray shells of the Germans, which, having passed beyond the fortress, had brought desolation to the country side. These little wooden houses in many places were mere heaps of burnt-out ashes. Others were half burned, or else collapsed, as if they had been houses built by children, who had afterwards kicked them down.

Everywhere, from the little homes that were unhurt, as well as from the ruined ones, the peasants were fleeing. With the passing of the first Russian regiment *away* from Grovno they had guessed what must inevitably follow.

There were bent-over old women and men carrying packs on their backs like beasts of burden, and in truth the Russian peasant has been nothing more for many centuries. The children, who ran along beside them, were incredibly thin and dirty and hungry.

One member of each little group would carry a lighted pine torch, pointing the way with fitful shadows. But wherever it was possible they followed in the wake of the wagons.

At first the night was dark and the American girls could hear their driver muttering strange Russian imprecations as his horses stumbled and felt their way along. Finally Barbara presented him with the electric lamp, which had been Dick Thornton's farewell present to her on the day of her sailing from New York City. She had used it many times since then, but never for a queerer purpose.

However, before they reached the river the moon had risen and both Nona and Barbara were grateful for the added light. Yet the scene they next witnessed was lighted by many camp fires.

The Russian infantry, who had been first to begin the retreat from Grovno, had camped on this side the river for a few hours rest.

A confused murmur of sounds arose. In little knots before the fires men squatted on their knees in Oriental fashion, waiting for the copper pots to boil. For at all hours of the day and night the Russian drinks tea, now more

than ever, since by command of the Czar the soldier is forbidden to touch alcohol.

The girls could observe that the men had curiously unlike faces. It was difficult to understand how they could all be Russians. Never before had they seen so many of the soldiers at one time. Some of them had flat faces and high cheek bones, with eyes like the Chinese.

It was very strange! Yet Nona whispered that they must remember some of these Russian soldiers had come from Asia, from beyond the Caspian Sea. Perhaps their ancestors had been members of the great Mongolian horde that had once invaded Europe under Genghis Khan.

In their interest Nona and Barbara began discussing the possible history of these soldiers aloud. By and by, one of the wounded men, who chanced to be a Russian university graduate, smiled to himself over the interest and excitement of the two American nurses. He had been suffering intensely from the jolting and was glad for anything that would distract his mind from his suffering.

“The soldiers you are discussing are called ‘Turcomen,’” he remarked aloud.

Nona and Barbara were startled by the voice out of the darkness, but they murmured confused thanks.

“Perhaps we had best not discuss our surroundings so openly,” Nona suggested, and Barbara agreed with a silent motion of her head.

By this time they had reached the central bridge. It was built of steel and stretched like a long line of silver across the dark river.

Over the bridge, like enormous over-burdened ants, the American girls could see other ambulance wagons moving slowly on. For the horses had become weary of their heavy loads and yet were to have no rest of any length until daylight.

On the farther side of the river there were other small encampments. But by and by Barbara Meade fell asleep with her head pressed against Nona's shoulder.

Occasionally Nona drowsed, but not often. She was torn between two worries. What would become of Mildred Thornton, left behind with strangers in a besieged fortress that might fall at any hour? Surely her situation was more fraught with danger than any in which the Red Cross girls had found themselves since their arrival in Europe.

Nona wished that she had taken sides with Barbara more decisively and refused to leave Grovno unless Mildred accompanied them.

But Mildred had disappeared so quickly. Then the order had come for their departure almost at the same instant. There had been so little time to protest or even to think what was best. Certainly Mildred herself should have refused to accept such a dangerous responsibility. But at the same moment that Nona condemned her friend, she realized that she would have done exactly the same thing in her place. In coming to assist with the Red Cross nursing they had promised to put the thought of duty first. Mildred could not shirk the most important task that had yet been asked of her.

Perhaps no harm would befall her. Certainly Nona appreciated that everything possible would be done to insure Mildred's safety. Her life and honor would be the first charge of the soldiers surrounding her. Moreover, General Alexis would certainly leave the fortress before there was a chance

of his being taken prisoner. He was too valuable a commander to have his services lost and the Germans would regard him as too important a capture.

So Nona's attention wandered from Mildred to her other friend, Sonya Valesky. What had become of Sonya and how was she ever to find her in the great and unknown city of Petrograd? If she only had a friend to consult, but she had even been compelled to leave Grovno without seeing Lieutenant Orlaff again. He had promised to write a few letters in Sonya's behalf, although assured that they would do no good.

Yet in some way Nona was determined to discover the Russian woman. Perhaps the Czar himself might be brought to pardon Sonya if he heard that she would leave for the United States and never return to Russia again. Then Nona smiled and sighed at the same time over her own simplicity. The Czar was at the head of his troops, with the fate of his crown and his country at stake. "What did one woman more or less count in times like these?"

Before daylight Nona must have also slept, because she was finally awakened by the stopping of their ambulance wagon.

When she opened her eyes she was surprised to see a rose flush in the sky and to hear the slow puffing of an engine.

The wagons had arrived at a small railroad station, connecting with the main road leading into Petrograd.

Word of the approach of the ambulances must have been sent ahead, for a train of more than a dozen coaches was even now in waiting.

As quickly as possible Nona and Barbara crawled out of their wagon, stamping their feet on the frozen ground and waving their arms in order to start their circulation. Then they began to assist in transferring the wounded soldiers from the wagons to the cars. The men were wonderfully patient and plucky, for they must have suffered tortures. They had first to be lifted on to an ambulance cot and then transferred to another cot inside the train. A few of the soldiers fainted and for them Nona and Barbara were relieved. At least they were spared the added pain.

Yet by and by, when the long line of cars started for Petrograd, the occupants of the coaches were amazingly cheerful. Tea and bread had been served all of the travelers and cigarettes given to the men.

Some of the soldiers sang, others told jokes, those who were most dangerously ill only lay still and smiled. They were on their way to Petrograd! This meant home and friends to some of them. To others it meant only the name of their greatest city and the palace of their Czar. But to all of them Petrograd promised comfort and quiet, away from the horrible, deafening noises of exploding bullets and shells.

Naturally Nona and Barbara were affected by the greater cheerfulness about them.

“If only Mildred were with us, how relieved I would be. Really, I don’t know how we are to bear the suspense of not knowing what has become of her,” Barbara said not once, but a dozen times in the course of the day.

But night brought them into the famous Russian capital.

[Back to contents](#)

CHAPTER XII

Petrograd

ON their arrival Barbara and Nona went with the wounded soldiers to a Red Cross hospital in Petrograd.

There, to her consternation, a few days later Nona Davis became ill. The illness was only an attack of malarial fever, which Nona had been subject to ever since her childhood; nevertheless, the disease had never chosen a more unpropitious time for its reappearance.

For a few days she seemed dangerously ill, then her convalescence left her weak and exhausted. She was totally unfit for work and only a burden instead of an aid to the hospital staff.

Poor Barbara had a busy, unhappy time of it. She did her best to look after Nona in spare moments from her regular nursing, and she also tried not to lose courage when no word came from Mildred. Neither from newspapers nor inquiries in all possible directions could she even learn whether Grovno had fallen.

She was unable to read the newspapers for herself and so was compelled to wait until one of the other nurses could find time to laboriously translate

the information into English.

Evidently at the present time the Russian papers did not desire the Russian people to learn the fate of the fortress and its commander. For all news on the subject was carefully withheld.

Under the strain Barbara might have broken down herself except for a piece of good fortune that at length came to Nona and to her.

An American woman, married to a Russian, the Countess Sergius, learning of the presence of the two American Red Cross nurses in the Russian hospital, called at once to see if she could do anything for their comfort. Discovering Nona ill and Barbara on the verge of a breakdown, the American woman insisted that the girls be her guests. They were not able to be of special assistance at the hospital under the present circumstances, while a week or so of rest and change might do wonders for them both.

In answer to Nona's protest that she was not well enough to be an agreeable visitor and could not bear the ordeal of meeting strangers, the older woman announced that the girls could live as quietly as they liked. She would let them have a private apartment in her house and they need see no one except the servants who would look after them.

As the American Countess was undoubtedly extremely wealthy and most anxious to be of service, Barbara and Nona gratefully accepted her invitation. So about ten days after their arrival in Petrograd they were living in one of the handsomest houses along the famous Nevski Prospect. This is the Fifth Avenue of Petrograd, a wide avenue three miles in length. Nothing is small in Russia or in the Russian people.

The girls were delightfully comfortable. One-half the third floor of the great house had been given up to them, consisting of two bedrooms, a bath, and a sitting room where their meals were served.

Indeed, the girls soon discovered that although the Countess meant to be hospitable and kind, she was sincerely glad that they wished to be left alone. She was an extremely busy woman, one of the important hostesses of Petrograd in times of peace. But now, like most society women in the allied countries, she was devoting all her energies to relief work. There were charity bazaars and concerts and Russian ballet performances, for the benefit of the soldiers, that must be managed day and night.

After three days of luxury and idleness Nona Davis felt strong again.

Perhaps more than the other Red Cross girls she deserved credit for her devotion to her nursing. For Nona had the southern temperament which loves beauty and ease, and there were times in her life when she had deliberately to shut her eyes to these enticements.

But now, with the thought of Sonya Valesky ever on her mind, she could not allow herself to relax an hour longer than necessary.

Contrary to Barbara Meade's judgment, Nona decided to ask the advice of their hostess as to how she should begin the search for her Russian friend.

Instantly the American woman became less cordial. But when Nona had told as much of the other woman's story as she dared, the Countess frankly discussed the situation with her.

If Nona would be guided by an older woman she would give up the quest for Sonya Valesky. Certainly Sonya's fate was an unhappy one, but she was wholly responsible for it herself. If she had been content to take life as she found it she would now have been occupying a brilliant position.

The Countess evidently had no use for reformers or persons who break away from recognized conditions. She confessed to Nona that her own position in Russian society had been difficult to attain. Not for worlds would she be suspected of having anything to do with a Socialist, or an Anarchist, or whatever dreadful character Nona's friend might be! The Countess was perfectly polite, but Nona thoroughly understood that if she insisted upon discovering the unfortunate Sonya, her presence as a guest in the Countess' home would no longer be desired.

Since there was nothing else to do, Nona decided that she must wait until help came from some unexpected direction. She had no idea of giving up the search for Sonya. But in the meantime she could enjoy a brief rest and see Petrograd.

In the winter time Petrograd is the most beautifully quiet city in the world. And now in war times it was scarcely less so, for the ground was covered with many inches of snow. There was a muffled sound even to the tread of the soldiers' feet, marching through the frozen streets. Neither was there a single wagon or carriage to be heard, since everybody went about in sleighs and everything was hauled in the same way. But now, because all the best horses were at the front, one often saw great oxen drawing sledges through the once gay and fashionable city.

The Countess Sergius had retained only a single pair of horses for her own use and that of her big household, nevertheless, she now and then loaned her sleigh for an afternoon to her two American girl guests.

Sight-seeing was the only amusement which kept Nona and Barbara from a morbid dwelling on their worries. Barbara had written to Judge and Mrs. Thornton in the way that Mildred had directed. But she could not feel that either of Mildred's parents would feel any the less wretched and uneasy because their daughter believed that she was only "doing her duty." Since the original letter Barbara had never been able to write them again. What could she say, except that no word of any kind had since been received from Mildred? There would be small consolation in this news, and of course Barbara wrote Dick every few days.

One afternoon Barbara and Nona left the Countess' house at about three o'clock and drove down the entire length of the Nevski Prospect toward the Winter Palace of the Czar.

There were scudding gray clouds overhead and a light snow falling.

No one could have failed to be interested. The Russian streets are ordinarily paved with sharp-edged stones, but the ice made them smooth as glass. Over the windows of the shops the girls could see painted pictures of what the shopkeepers had to sell inside. This is common in Russia, since so many of her poorer people are unable to read.

Most of the buildings in Petrograd are of stucco, and indeed, except for her churches and a few other buildings, the Russian capital resembles a poor imitation of Paris. Peter the Great, who constructed the city upon the swamp lands surrounding the river Neva, was determined to force Russia into the western world instead of the east. For this reason he brought all his artists from France and Italy, so that he might model his new city upon their older ones.

The Winter Palace itself the girls discovered to be a Renaissance building, with one side facing the river and the other a broad square. Their sleigh stopped by the tall monolith column commemorating Alexander the First, which stands almost directly in front of the Palace. Leading from the Palace to the Hermitage, once the palace of the great Catherine, is a covered archway.

The Hermitage is one of the greatest art museums in the world and contains one of the finest collections of paintings in Europe. Although the two Red Cross girls had now been in Petrograd several weeks, neither of them had yet been inside the famous gallery.

“Suppose we go in now and see the pictures,” Barbara proposed. “We might as well take advantage of our opportunities, even if we are miserable,” she added with the characteristic wrinkling of her small nose. “Besides, I’m frozen, and you must be more so, Nona. How I have adored my squirrel coat and cap ever since we came to this arctic zone! Thank fortune, our Countess has loaned you some furs, Nona! Do you know, I really am not so surprised that your mother was a Russian noble woman. You look like my idea of a Russian princess, with your pale gold hair showing against that brown fur. Who knows, maybe you’ll turn into a Russian princess some day! But shall I tell our driver to stop?”

Nona Davis shook her head, smiling and yet rather pathetic, in spite of her lovely appearance in borrowed finery.

“I don’t want to be a Russian princess, Bab, or a Russian anything, I am afraid, in spite of my heritage. I think it a good deal nicer to be engaged to an American like Dick Thornton. If you don’t mind, let’s don’t try to see the pictures today. I am tired and we ought to be fresh for such an experience. If you are cold, suppose we go back into the center of the town and walk

about for a while. Then we can send the sleigh home to the Countess. I don't feel that we should keep it for our use the entire afternoon, and if we stop to look at the pictures it would take the rest of the day. There are some queer side streets that join the Nevski Prospect I should like to see."

The Countess Sergius lived about two miles away from the Winter Palace. When the girls were within a quarter of a mile of the house where they were guests, they finally got out of the sleigh. Their driver was an old man with a long beard and not the character of servant the American Countess would have employed under ordinary conditions. But her former young men servants were in the army, and like other wealthy families in Russia at this time, she was glad to employ any one possible.

However, Nona undertook to make the man understand that they would not need his services again that afternoon. She had more of a gift for languages than the western girl and her knowledge of French was always useful. So after a little hesitation, the big sleigh at last drove away. And actually for the first time since their arrival in Petrograd Nona and Barbara found themselves alone in the Russian streets.

There could be no danger of getting lost, for they had only to come to this central thoroughfare and the Countess' house lay straight ahead.

So the two girls turned into the side street that lay nearest them.

After a five minutes walk they found themselves in another world.

On the Nevski Prospect they were in Europe; here they were in Asia.

It was curious, but even the smells were different. These were Asiatic odors, if the girls had only known, queer smells of musk and attar of roses

and other less pleasant things.

The Russian women and children were crowding the narrow streets, while inside the little shops the wares were displayed on big tables. In the summer time these goods were sold on open stalls in the streets.

“Let us go into one of the shops and buy a few trinkets,” Barbara suggested. “I would like to own one of those embroidered Russian aprons.”

Then she stopped, her attention caught, as Nona’s had been, by a sudden rustling in the air above them. A moment later a flock of gray and white pigeons was crowding about their feet. These also were the pigeons that haunt the thoroughfares of the east.

Personally Nona Davis would have preferred remaining outside in the fresh air. She was cold, but she objected to the squalid atmosphere of the interior of so many Russian houses. However, she could not refuse to agree to every request Barbara made of her all that afternoon.

A moment later and she was almost as interested as the younger girl in making purchases.

There were odd pieces of beautiful, gayly colored embroideries that, according to American ideas, appeared incredibly cheap. Then there were bits of Russian brass, that seemed to interest Barbara particularly, as it is probable that she had a sudden rush of the housekeeper’s ardor. Here were interesting things that might be purchased for her own and Dick’s apartment in New York almost for nothing!

Whatever the cause, Nona, after fifteen or twenty minutes, found her own pleasure cooling. Moreover, she had very little money to spend on

frivolities, and so found a stool in a corner and sat down to wait for Barbara and to watch the crowd.

There were numbers of people in the shop, although few of them seemed to be making purchases. Now and then a big soldier, crowned by his peaked fur cap, would stalk proudly in to purchase a trinket, possibly for the girl of his heart. The Russians are ardent lovers, and as the soldier was only at home on a short leave, he had to make the best of his opportunity.

Most of the women who were not wearing furs had heavy shawls drawn over their heads and shoulders. Nona could not see their faces very well, and only received flitting impressions of dark eyes and large, heavy features, with almost always the curiously pale and yet sallow skin peculiar to the Russian peasant. It is only among the better classes that one finds other types.

Suddenly Nona gave a cry of alarm, which she quickly hushed. To her surprise some one had quietly come up back of her and laid a hand on her shoulder. It was one of these same peasant women, wearing a heavy, dark shawl.

She was trying to say something which Nona could not at once understand. Yet it was plain enough that the woman was imploring her to make no disturbance that would attract attention.

The next moment Nona had recognized the woman. It was old Katja, Sonya Valesky's servant, whom she had left with Nika in her little hut.

What had brought the old woman to Petrograd? In reality Nona knew without asking the question. It was Katja's devotion to Sonya.

The old woman was speaking a queer jumble of languages, Russian and the few words of English she had learned while the American girl was living in the same house.

What Nona finally learned was, that Katja was imploring her to meet her somewhere the next day, where they could talk without being observed.

Nona knew of no place except the one that was always open to rich and poor alike in Russia. And she had to think quickly. Yet the churches had always been their refuge ever since the arrival of the four Red Cross girls in Europe.

At the same moment Nona could only recall the most celebrated Russian church in Petrograd. She must lose no time, for even Barbara must not learn of her mission, and Barbara might turn and come back to join her at any moment.

“In the Cathedral of St. Isaac, toward the left and in the rear of the church at three o’clock tomorrow,” Nona murmured. And Katja must have understood, for she went away at once.

It was just as well, because at almost the same moment Barbara returned to join Nona, her arms full of queer-shaped packages, and looking happier than she had since their arrival in the Russian city.

[Back to contents](#)

CHAPTER XIII

The Next Step

THE following afternoon it seemed to Nona Davis that all Petrograd was a-glitter with onion-shaped domes. The Russian priests explained that these domes were really shaped like folded rosebuds, symbolizing the church on earth that was to blossom in heaven. But to see them in this fashion required a Russian imagination.

However, the effect was very beautiful, and Nona was glad to have her attention diverted, as she started out to find the Cathedral of St. Isaac. Some of the domes were of blue, set with stars to represent the canopy of the sky. But Nona knew that the central dome of St. Isaac's was an enormous copper ball covered with gold and that its radiance could be seen at a great distance.

She had had great difficulty in fulfilling her engagement with Katja. At first she had tried to deceive Barbara in regard to her intention, being fully determined to continue her search for Sonya until she had discovered her; nevertheless, it did not seem worth while to trouble Barbara while she had no actual information to go upon. But Barbara would not be deceived.

Nona suggested that she wished to walk for several hours and feared the younger girl might become fatigued. In reply Barbara assured her that there was nothing she herself so much desired as exercise, and as for growing tired, Nona would the sooner be worn out, since she was the one who had been ill.

Afterwards, while there were other excuses for her departure which Nona struggled to invent, all were equally useless. From the first Barbara had guessed her plan. Although she had seen nothing and knew nothing of Nona's meeting with Katja the day before, she had immediately guessed that Nona's desire for a solitary excursion was in some way connected with her effort to find Sonya Valesky. And this effort the younger girl continued to oppose.

So Nona had finally departed, leaving Barbara in tears over her obstinacy and foolhardiness. She was very unhappy, but what else was possible for her to do? Had Barbara been in the same need that Sonya now was, surely no one could have persuaded her to turn her back upon Barbara.

Katja was waiting and fortunately there were but a few other persons in the Cathedral at the same hour.

As quickly and as intelligently as she knew how, the old woman explained that Sonya was in a civil prison in Petrograd and was to be tried for treason within another week. Katja had not seen her child, but had received a few lines in reply to a dozen letters which a friend had written for her. Katja herself could neither read nor write.

Although Nona could speak only a few words of Russian, she had learned to read a little of the language with difficulty. Now she managed to translate her friend's ideas, if not her exact words.

Sonya did not wish Katja to try to see her nor to attempt to appear at the prison at the hour of her trial. Nothing could be done for her release and Katja would only be made the more miserable. Neither was Katja to let Nona know anything of her whereabouts until after sentence was passed. Then if Katja could find the American girl she was to say farewell for Sonya Valesky. She was also to thank Nona for her kindness and add that the acquaintance with her friend's daughter had brought Sonya much happiness.

Standing with the crumpled sheet of paper in her hand, written by the woman who so soon expected to say farewell to the things that make life worth living, Nona Davis felt her own cheeks flush and her eyes fill with tears. How little had she really deserved the Russian woman's affection, for how much she had distrusted her!

Well, Nona again determined to do all that was possible now to prove her allegiance.

As soon as she could get away from Katja, Nona secured a sleigh and drove at once to the house of the American Ambassador. Because her card represented her as an American Red Cross nurse she felt assured that she would be treated with every courtesy.

This was perfectly true, although obliged to wait half an hour; finally one of the secretaries of the Ambassador invited the American girl into a small office. She could not, of course, see the Ambassador without a special engagement, but the secretary would be pleased to do whatever was possible.

Nona was both pleased and relieved. The secretary proved to be a southerner, a young fellow from Georgia, who could not have been more

than twenty-five years old. Certainly it was far easier to tell the story of Sonya Valesky to him than to an older man or to one whose time was more valuable.

Nevertheless, when she had finished, although there was no doubt of the secretary's attention and interest, Nona found him equally as discouraging as everybody else had been concerning Sonya Valesky's fate and any part which she might have hoped to play in it. There could be little doubt that Sonya would be condemned to Siberia. She was a political prisoner and would not be tried by a military court. Her offense was spoken of as sedition, or as an infringement of the "Defense of the Realm" act. For Sonya had been endeavoring to induce the Russian soldiers to join her peace societies rather than to fight for their country.

The young American secretary did his best to make the situation plain to Nona Davis. In England or France, under the same circumstances, Sonya Valesky might have escaped with only a short term of imprisonment or a fine. But this would not be true in Russia. Besides, it appeared that Sonya was an old offender and that her socialist ideas were well known. It would be impossible for the American Ambassador or any member of his staff to make the smallest effort in Sonya's behalf. Such an effort would represent an act of discourtesy on the part of the United States Government, as if she were attempting to interfere with Russia's treatment of her own subjects.

There was one thing only which the young secretary could undertake in Nona's cause. He would make an effort to have her allowed to visit her friend. If Sonya's trial was not to take place for a week, it was just possible that the American girl might be permitted to see her.

So Nona was compelled to go away with only this small consolation.

However, before leaving she secured the address of an American family in Petrograd who might be willing to take her as a boarder. For Nona realized that with her present plan she could not longer remain as a guest in the Countess' house.

Then Barbara had again to be reckoned with. It was early dusk when Nona Davis finally reached their apartment in the splendid Russian house. Barbara had just finished tea, but the tea things had not been sent away.

Because Nona was evidently so tired and discouraged the younger girl comforted her with tea and cakes before beginning to ask questions. Afterwards Barbara insisted upon being told the entire account of the afternoon's experiences. Nona must begin with her meeting with Katja, her interview in the Cathedral, then her visit to the house of the United States Ambassador and finally the description of the place where she had engaged board before returning to her temporary home.

Although Barbara was ordinarily much given to conversation and frequent interruptions of other people's anecdotes, she listened without comment until the other girl had finished.

"We are both too tired to pack up our few possessions tonight, Nona," she answered in conclusion; "but we can attend to them in the morning and then say good-by to the Countess."

Nona was lying upon a divan with her yellow head sunk among a number of brown cushions, but she got half way up at Barbara's words.

"But I don't expect *you* to leave here, Barbara dear, to go with me," she protested. "I didn't engage board for anyone else. The house where I am to stay is shabby and not especially comfortable. I wouldn't have you leave

this lovely home for worlds! I am sorry, you may be a little lonely without me. But I am hoping we may hear from Mildred at almost any hour and then I'm sure the Countess would be only too happy to have her take my place here. I expect Mildred will be a distinguished character after having been chosen to nurse the great General Alexis."

"Don't talk nonsense," Barbara protested, in answer to the first part of her friend's speech. "Of course, I am not going to let you wander off and live in a strange family by yourself." Then Barbara sighed.

She was sitting on a small stool beside Nona's couch, resting her chin on her hand and looking very childish and homesick.

"Of course, I know you have to do whatever you can for Sonya Valesky, Nona," she agreed unexpectedly. "In your position I hope I would have the courage to behave in the same way. I have only made a fuss about things because I was worried for you, but I have always known you would not pay any attention to me. Nobody ever does."

Although Nona laughed and attempted to argue this point, Barbara remained unconvinced.

"Oh, well, possibly Dick or Eugenia can sometimes be persuaded into doing what I ask, but never you or Mildred," she concluded, and then sighed again. "If we could hear just a single word from Mildred!"

The next day the two girls moved to their new lodgings. Their hostess was gracious enough, but made no protest when Nona explained that she expected to be permitted to visit the Russian prisoner within the next few days.

The order to see Sonya came sooner than Nona expected. Indeed, the two girls had only been in their new quarters for about thirty-six hours when the young secretary from the embassy called upon them. With him he brought the permit from the Russian government.

Nona was to be allowed to visit the prison near the Troitska bridge on the following day and to spend ten minutes with her friend. She must understand that a guard would listen to whatever conversation was held. Also she must take with her nothing of any kind to present to Sonya Valesky. Their interview would be closely watched.

Naturally Barbara Meade insisted upon accompanying Nona. She knew, of course, that she would not be allowed to see the prisoner, nor had she the least wish to see her. But she could wait in some antechamber until the ten minutes passed and then bring Nona safely back to their lodging place. For certainly the experience ahead of her friend would be a painful one, and although Nona did her best to conceal her nervousness from the younger girl, Barbara again was not deluded.

When the two girls set out for the prison the next afternoon it would have been difficult to decide which one most dreaded the ordeal. But in truth the ordeal was in a way a mutual one. While she waited, doubtless Barbara's imagination would paint as tragic a scene as Nona might be obliged to go through with.

It seemed to Nona Davis, after leaving Barbara, that she walked down a mile or more of corridor. The corridor might have been an underground sewer, so dark and unwholesome were its sights and smells. It led past dozens of small iron doors with locks and chains fastened on the outside.

Finally Nona's guard paused before one of these doors and then opened it. Inside was an iron grating with bars placed at intervals of about six inches apart. The room it barricaded was six feet square and contained a bed and stool. There was one small window overhead, not much larger than a single pane of glass in an average old-fashioned window.

But the light from the window fell directly upon the head of the woman who was seated beneath it.

Sonya Valesky had not been told that she was to receive a visitor. So perhaps Nona did appear like a sudden vision of a Fra Angelico angel, standing unexpectedly in the dark corridor with her hair as golden as a shaft of sunlight.

Sonya only stared at the girl without speaking. But Nona saw that her friend's dark hair, which had been a little streaked with gray at their first meeting more than two years before, was now almost pure white. However, Sonya did not look particularly ill or unhappy; her blue eyes were still serene. Whatever faith in life she may have lost, she had not lost faith in the cause for which she must suffer.

"Don't you know me, Sonya?" Nona asked almost timidly, as if she were talking to a stranger.

Then the Russian woman came forward with all her former dignity and grace. She was wearing a black dress of some rough material, but it seemed to Nona Davis that she had never seen a more beautiful woman. Sonya was like a white lily found growing in some underground dungeon.

She put her hands through the bars and took hold of Nona's cold ones.

“This is wonderfully kind of you, Nona?” she said with the simplicity of manner that had always distinguished her. “I have wanted to know what had become of you and your friends. Somehow information sifts even inside a prison in war times, and I have learned that General Alexis gave up trying to hold Grovno. You are on your way back home, I trust.”

Nona could scarcely reply. It seemed so strange that Sonya could be talking in such an everyday fashion, as if her visit were being made under ordinary circumstances. Not a word did she say of her own sorrow or the tragedy that lay ahead of her.

Nona could only fight back the tears. “We are returning to France as soon as Mildred Thornton joins us in Petrograd,” she answered, and then explained that Mildred had stayed behind at Grovno.

“But isn’t there anything I can do for you, Sonya?” Nona added. “I shall certainly not leave Petrograd until after your trial, and then if you are released you must come away with me.”

The older woman only shook her head.

“I shall not be released, Nona, so don’t make yourself unhappy with false hopes. This is not my first offense against the government of Russia. I have never believed in the things in which they believe, not since I was a little girl. I suppose I am a troublesome character. But after all, in going to Siberia I am only following the footsteps of greater men and women than I can hope to resemble.”

Sonya let go Nona’s hands and stepped back into her little room. From under her pillow she drew a small folded paper.

“In going to Siberia I forfeit all my estates, Nona,” Sonya Valesky explained when she came back. “But I have a small amount of money in the United States, as well as in my own country. Perhaps the government may be willing to allow me to dispose of my property, although of course I can’t tell. But I have made a will and had it witnessed here in the prison. If it is possible I want you to have half of the little I have left and Katja and Nika the rest. There would be no chance to leave it to the cause of peace in these days.”

Nona received the little paper.

“You won’t be in Siberia all your life, Sonya, that I won’t believe,” she protested. “Some day when this war is over the Czar will pardon you. Please remember that I shall never forget you and never stop trying to do what I can for your release. If I am allowed to have it, I will take care of your money until you are able to come to me.”

Hearing a guttural noise behind her, Nona Davis now turned around. Her guard was signaling that the time allotted for her visit was over.

She was not able to kiss the older woman good-by, only to hold both her hands close for another moment and then to go away with her eyes so blinded with tears that she could not see. Yet she never forgot the picture that Sonya Valesky made when she had a final glance at her.

Four days later a few lines appeared in the Russian daily papers, stating that Sonya Valesky, a woman of noble birth, but at present a Russian nihilist, had been condemned to penal servitude in Siberia for life. She had been proved guilty of treason to the Imperial Government.

[Back to contents](#)

CHAPTER XIV

Mildred's Return

ON the same afternoon that Nona and Barbara read the news of Sonya Valesky's sentence, Mildred Thornton came to Petrograd.

Her return was characteristic of Mildred.

It was a little past twilight and Nona and Barbara were in their shabby sitting room; they now shared the same bedroom in the new lodgings. Nona had been crying, and in order to try and make her forget, Barbara was reading aloud. She had received a package of books and magazines from Dick Thornton earlier in the day, but this was her first chance to look them over.

Although endeavoring to listen, in reality Nona's attention was only pretence. Her thoughts were with the Russian woman whose life had been so strangely associated with her own. It seemed to Nona that she had not realized how much she cared for Sonya Valesky until these last few weeks. She had become like an exquisite older sister whom she might possibly have had as a companion and friend. Never had Nona been more conscious of her own loneliness. It is true that she had been more or less lonely all her

life, but this she had taken as a matter of course. Now in these last few hours she had suddenly been overwhelmed by the thought.

Apparently their work as Red Cross nurses in Europe was nearly over. At least, when Mildred finally joined them, the three girls intended returning to France to spend a little time with Madame Castaigne and Eugenia. Then Barbara and Mildred would doubtless go back to their homes in the United States. Barbara would be married in a short time and Mildred would not wish to remain longer away from her mother and father. But Nona had no home and no people to whom she might return.

The girl was glad at this moment that there were no lights in their sitting room save the two candles which were directly behind Barbara's book. She did not wish the younger girl to guess the extent of her depression.

Yet it was Nona who first heard the knock at their sitting room door. Quickly as possible she got up and walked forward to open it, not even attempting to smooth her hair or to wipe the traces of tears from her face. Barbara did not glance from the page of her book, both girls were so convinced that it was only the woman who usually brought them their dinner at this hour.

When Nona opened the door, Mildred took her by both shoulders and quietly kissed her.

"Mildred!" It was Nona's exclamation that finally aroused Barbara Meade. But even then, although Barbara rose to her feet, dropping her book on the floor, she did not move forward. She let Mildred come and put her arms around her and kiss her on both cheeks. Then Mildred stood still in the center of the room and smiled at her two friends.

“Won’t either one of you say she is glad to see me?” she asked, with a mixture of gayety and wistfulness.

By this time Barbara and Nona were both embracing the newcomer at once, and at the same time attempting to remove her wraps. Under her nursing coat Mildred was wearing a long sable coat, suitable for a princess, but neither of the girls noticed it in the excitement of her arrival.

“Where did you come from? Oh, Mildred, what have you been doing all this time? I have nearly died of anxiety.” Barbara protested. “Surely you could have gotten us some word, if only to say you were alive.”

Mildred shook her head. “I couldn’t, dear. I have come back to you the very first moment it was possible. But it is a long story. I can’t tell you all at once. May I sit down?”

At last Nona and Barbara had the grace to observe that Mildred looked white and tired.

“I arrived in Petrograd about half an hour ago with General Alexis and his staff and the Russian maid who has been with us ever since we were left behind at Grovno,” she explained, when her friends had thrust her unceremoniously into their only comfortable chair.

“I told General Alexis that I must find you at once, so we drove to the United States Embassy and they gave us your address. Then they left me here. I am dreadfully hungry; can’t we have something to eat before I finish my story?”

“Certainly not,” Barbara insisted, “or not until you have answered two or three more questions. For I am much more apt to die of curiosity than

you are to perish of starvation. How long did you remain at Grovno, and did the Germans ever capture you? I suppose your general didn't die, if he escorted you to our humble door. But if he wasn't desperately ill, why did he have you stay so long in a position of such danger?" And Barbara ceased to ask more questions simply because her breath had given out.

At the same instant Nona signaled a warning glance. Mildred was almost fainting with exhaustion. In these last few weeks she must have passed through difficult experiences and naturally she could not tell them everything at once.

"Please go downstairs and ask that dinner be sent up, Barbara," Nona demanded. "And get soup or milk or something special; if not I'll make some beef tea for Mildred on the alcohol lamp. Mildred, suppose you put on my wrapper and lie down until after you have eaten, then we can talk as long as you have strength for."

And the girls did talk until nearly midnight in spite of Mildred's fatigue. She was perfectly well, only tired, she insisted, and greatly excited at seeing Nona and Barbara again.

She had passed through events in these past few weeks such as few women have ever known. But of course Mildred related what had taken place in a simple, almost matter of fact fashion. She was so little given to heroics, or to thinking of herself as a conspicuous personage.

"Yes, they had stayed on at Grovno until almost the hour when the Germans entered the old fortress. General Alexis had been wounded, but had not considered his wound serious and would not desert his post until he had finally accomplished his purpose. For the last hour virtually only six persons had kept the German army from entering the fortifications: General

Alexis, Colonel Feodorovitch, two lieutenants and two private soldiers, although the Russian physician, who had remained with his commander, had turned soldier toward the last.”

“But you don’t mean that you continued inside the fort to the very end?” Barbara demanded almost angrily. “I suppose you were forgotten.”

“I think I was at the last,” Mildred returned. “You see, at first when General Alexis discovered that I was the Red Cross nurse who had been chosen to stay behind, he was angry and insisted that I leave at once. But by the time he learned of my presence, it was too late to find me an escort. Besides, the doctor did not wish me to go. There was a Russian woman, a kind of servant, who was also with us, and did the cooking, I believe, if we ever ate. Anyhow, she stayed with me and looked after me when she could, so that I was never actually alone.”

“But Mildred,” Nona asked, guessing at many details that her friend did not mention, “how did you finally get away at last? And have you come directly here from Grovno? Surely the fort did not hold out all these weeks.”

“No, we have been away from Grovno nearly two weeks, I can’t remember the exact passage of time very well,” Mildred explained, lifting her hands to let down the long braids of her heavy flaxen hair, and allowing the hairpins to drop girl fashion, carelessly into her lap. She was wearing Nona’s kimono, and it is always easier to talk confidentially with one’s hair down, if one happens to have the mass that Mildred had. The very weight of it was oppressive when she was tired.

“Yes, it was terribly interesting toward the last,” she went on, “although I don’t believe even then we were in great danger. General Alexis is too

wise to have permitted that. Everything was in readiness; all the plans were made days beforehand for our getting away. The different regiments of private soldiers with their officers continued to march away from Grovno, and so much ammunition was moved that I think almost no stores of any value were left. Then the moment finally came for our own retreat.”

To Barbara’s intense irritation, Mildred actually paused for an instant at this point in her story. But she continued almost immediately.

“There was an underground passage outside the fort, leading all the way to the river. The seven of us at last left the fort together. By this time General Alexis had almost to be carried, the pain from his wound had grown so intense. Then every once in a while, as we went on, one of the soldiers would place a bomb in such a position that it would explode after we had gone. In this way the underground passage was wrecked, so there never was any possibility of the Germans being able to follow us. When we reached the bridge over the river two motor cars were waiting for us. Colonel Feodorovitch, one of the lieutenants and the two private soldiers stayed to see that the last bridge over the Styr was blown up. The other five, General Alexis, his physician, and one officer and we two women started west in an effort to join the retreating regiments, who were to come up with a portion of the Grand Duke’s army.”

“Goodness, Mildred Thornton, what an experience you have been through!” Nona ejaculated. “Yet you talk as quietly as if it were almost an ordinary occurrence!”

Mildred shook her head. “It is not because I feel it an ordinary experience, Nona, but because so much has happened I am overpowered by the bigness of it. Really, when we got safely away from the fort, the battle, or at least my share in it, was only about to begin. We had gone a few miles

into the country, when General Alexis became desperately ill. Unless he could have immediate attention his physician said there was no possible hope for his life.”

Barbara had by this time slipped out of her chair and was sitting on the floor with her hands clasped over her knees, looking all eyes, and rocking herself slowly back and forward as a relief for her excitement.

“But you brought your general back with you, Mildred Thornton, or you said you did. How on earth did you manage about him?” she interrupted.

“That is just what I am going to tell you, because that explains where I have been and why I have not been able to let you hear from me. Our Russian doctor ordered our motor car stopped and we entered a Russian house some distance from any main road. We purposely chose a house that had been deserted, and there we have been for two weeks, struggling to save the life of General Alexis. Of course, his wound had been more serious than he would admit. The wonder is that he is still alive!”

“But he has recovered?” Barbara inquired with her usual unsatisfied curiosity. “Goodness, Mill, what a heroine you will be, to have nursed one of the most famous generals in the Allied armies and to have restored him to health. Won’t your mother be charmed!”

Naturally Mildred smiled. The thought of her mother’s pleasure in her distinction *had* occurred to her several times in the last two weeks.

“Oh, of course I am glad to have had the honor, Bab, because I too think General Alexis a great man. He is perhaps the simplest man I have ever known, except my father, and I like him very much. Only he has not recovered and I have not restored him to health. If General Alexis had

recovered he would never have come to Petrograd, he would have rejoined his troops. But he was well enough to be moved and Petrograd seemed the safest place for him at present. Besides, I believe he wished to have an audience with the Czar.”

Barbara again rocked back and forth. “You say ‘Czar,’ Mill, just as if you were speaking of an everyday person. Really, I believe you are the best bred girl I ever saw. Position, wealth, no distinctions seem to excite you. You just take people for exactly what they are,” Barbara murmured, in reality speaking to herself.

But Nona overheard her. “You are quite right, Bab,” she agreed. “Mildred does not know it, but she has taught me many a lesson on that subject since we came to Europe. It would be a nicer world if everybody thought and acted as Mildred does. But what has become of your general, Mill? Are you to go on nursing him or to see him again?”

“No, to the first question, Nona dear, and yes, to the second. Now I am so tired I simply must go to bed. I told the doctor and General Alexis that since he was better, I wanted to come to you. Besides, I was sure that here in Petrograd there would be so many cleverer nurses than I can ever hope to be. And I didn’t want to stay at the Winter Palace with you girls here.”

“You mean,” Nona asked quietly, “that you were invited to be a guest at the Czar’s own palace and you declined?”

Mildred clasped her hands behind her head. “Oh, I thought I told you. General Alexis is to be at the Winter Palace while he is in Petrograd. He is very close to the Czar, I believe. As his nurse, of course I was asked to stay there with him; he is to have his physician and his aides as well as his

servants in attendance. There was nothing personal in my being permitted inside the Palace. Some other nurse will take my place.”

“But the point is, Mildred Thornton, that you refused to stay under the same roof with the Czar of all the Russias. Never so long as you live will your mother forgive you.”

The other girl flushed and laughed. “I hadn’t thought of that, Bab dear. Please don’t tell on me. But we are to be under the same roof with the Czar some day for a few moments, all of us. General Alexis said that he wished to have us presented to the Czar and Czarina, if it were possible to arrange. He seems to feel grateful to me for the little I was able to do. But please, Bab, don’t say that I refused to continue to nurse General Alexis. I only asked that they get some one to take my place, who would be wiser.”

“Did General Alexis agree to a new nurse for that reason, Mildred?” Barbara demanded in her driest manner.

But Mildred was too tired for further conversation.

“Oh, he was kind enough to say that I needed a rest more than he required my services. Am I to have a bed or the cot in this sitting room?”

“You may have them *all*, Mildred Thornton!” Barbara returned, getting up on her feet and then bowing until her forehead almost touched the floor.

“Any human being who is going to allow me to enter the presence of the Czar and Czarina, has got to be treated like royalty for the rest of her life.”

Nevertheless, Barbara kissed Mildred good night. Mildred whispered, “Don’t be a goose,” and then at last was permitted to retire.

[Back to contents](#)

CHAPTER XV

The Winter Palace

THE next day Nona found opportunity for confiding to Mildred the fate of Sonya Valesky. She found Mildred more deeply concerned than Barbara had been. This was true because Mildred had a different nature; it was easier for her to understand a temperament that would sacrifice everything to its dream, than for the more practical and sensible Barbara. Moreover, Barbara was so much in love these days that she found it difficult to give a great deal of thought to other people. She struggled against the tendency, but it is ever the vice of lovers.

Finally, on Thursday, Mildred Thornton received a note from General Alexis inviting her and her two friends to come that afternoon at four o'clock to the Winter Palace. And although the three girls were Americans, they understood that such an invitation was not in reality an invitation, but a command. For the Czar and Czarina had announced that they would be pleased to meet the three American Red Cross nurses.

The meeting was to be informal, as these were war times and there were no court levees. Indeed, the Czar was only staying for a brief time at his palace before going to take command of his own troops. Owing to the

frequent Russian defeats in the past few months, the Czar had concluded that he must command his men in person in order to give them greater courage and steadfastness. The munitions of war, of which they had been sadly in need for several months, were now pouring in from Japan and the United States.

Of course, in the excitement and nervousness due to such an important and unexpected occasion, the three Red Cross girls had the same problem to settle that attacks all women at critical moments:

“What on earth should they wear to the presentation?”

Fortunately, under the circumstances there was but one answer to this question. They were invited to the Palace as Red Cross nurses, they must therefore wear their Red Cross uniforms. Since the three girls had almost nothing else left in their wardrobes, this was just as well. Constant moving from place to place, with little opportunity for transportation, had reduced their luggage to the most limited amounts.

Yet assuredly they were as handsome and far more dignified on the afternoon of their appearance at the Winter Palace in the costumes of American Red Cross nurses, than if they had been appareled in the court trains and feathers of more gala occasions.

Mildred always looked especially well in her uniform. She was less pretty than the other two girls. But for this very reason her dignity and the sense of serenity that her personality suggested showed to best advantage in the simple toilette of white with the Red Cross insignia on the arm. However, over her uniform Mildred wore the magnificent sable coat in which she had appeared at her friends' lodgings in Petrograd.

This afternoon, in spite of her excitement over what lay ahead of them, Barbara did not allow the coat to pass unnoticed a second time.

“For goodness’ sake, Mildred, where did you get that magnificent garment?” she demanded, just as they were about to go downstairs to get into their sleigh. “You owned a very nice coat when we left you behind in Grovno, but some fairy wand must have changed it. This is the most wonderful sable I ever saw.”

Mildred flushed and then laid her cheek against the beautiful, soft brown warmth of her furs. “It is time you and Nona were speaking of my grandeur,” she declared. “You see, in getting away from the fort at the last I stupidly left my own furs behind; indeed, I don’t know what became of them. General Alexis noticed that I was cold almost immediately. Somehow, after he began to get stronger, he managed to have this coat brought to the country house where we were staying. Then just before we started to Petrograd he presented it to me. Of course, I did not feel that I ought to accept it and insisted I could not. But General Alexis said that he had received so much kindness from me, he thought it very ungenerous of me to make him altogether my debtor. I didn’t know what to do. Do you think it wrong to accept it, Bab? Somehow I did not know how to continue to refuse.”

As Barbara was just going into her bedroom at this moment, she made no reply. Nona was more reassuring.

“Of course it was all right, Mildred, or at least I suppose it was if General Alexis insisted, and you had done a great deal for him.”

Then Nona followed Barbara. Barbara was standing perfectly still in the center of the room and apparently thinking with all the concentration

possible.

“I wonder if this General Alexis is more fond of Mildred than he would be of any nurse who might have cared for him?” Barbara murmured. Then she shook her head. “That was an absurd suggestion on my part and Mildred would not like it. I am sorry,” she said.

At the door of the Winter Palace, after the girls had passed beyond the servants and the detectives who watch every human being permitted to approach their Imperial Majesties, the three American girls were ushered into a reception room. Except for the fact that there were more paintings on the walls, the room resembled other similar chambers now left on exhibition at Versailles or the Louvre in Paris.

However, the girls had little time for investigation, for almost at once General Alexis entered the room to greet them. He was accompanied by a lieutenant who was his aide. To Nona Davis’ surprise, the young man proved to be Lieutenant Michael Orlaff, whom she had not seen since the afternoon when she had walked to the fortress with him and confided the news of Sonya Valesky’s arrest.

After a few moments of general conversation a man servant, wearing an elaborate uniform, announced that General Alexis and his guests might walk into the Czar’s private sitting room.

Naturally this was a very unusual proceeding, but war times had changed the manners of courts as well as other places. Moreover, General Alexis was a personal friend of the Czar’s, so far as a Czar may ever have a friend. In any case, he was one of his most trusted generals. This reception to the American Red Cross girls was entirely due to the fact that General

Alexis had declared Mildred Thornton's courage and devotion had saved his life. But of this she was not yet aware.

The Czar and Czarina were not decorating gilded thrones as one sees them in portraits or paints them in one's own imagination. Indeed, they were seated in chairs, but rose as any other host and hostess might when their guests came into the room. They were not alone, however, for beside the guards stationed outside their door, two of them kept always within a short distance of the Czar himself.

The Czarina was a beautiful woman, tall and dark, but looking infinitely sad. The girls could not but remember having heard how frequently she suffered from a melancholia so severe that it was almost akin to an unbalanced mind.

She now murmured a few words to the three girls and then reseated herself. Barbara hoped profoundly that the distinguished audience would soon be over. Of course, this meeting of the Czar and Czarina was perhaps the most extraordinary honor that had yet been paid to any American Red Cross nurses in Europe. But like other honors, it carried its discomfort. For Barbara had not the faintest idea what she should do or say, when she should stand up and when sit down. She had never imagined herself a large person before, but now she felt so awkward that she might have been a giant. Yet really there was but one thing for her to do: she must merely keep still and watch what was taking place.

Actually the Czar, Nicholas II, was talking pleasantly with Mildred Thornton, and Mildred was answering with her usual quiet dignity.

The Czar looked older than Barbara would have supposed from his pictures. But then the war may have aged him. His close-cropped brown

beard with the tiny point was turning gray. And he had large, full and, Barbara thought, not particularly intelligent eyes.

At this moment he moved toward a small table and picked up what appeared like a medal.

Barbara eyed it curiously. She could not hear what the Czar was saying. But she saw Mildred turn suddenly white and appear to protest. Then the two men, General Alexis and the Czar, actually smiled at her. The next moment the Czar pinned a cross on Mildred's white dress.

Without realizing what she was doing, Barbara pressed closer until she stood in front of Nona and Lieutenant Orlaff. This time she distinctly heard the Czar say:

"I take pleasure in presenting you, Miss Thornton, with the Cross of St. George, which is only awarded for special bravery. Only one other woman has been presented with the Cross of St. George since the outbreak of this war. She is Madame Kokavtseva, a colonel of the Sixth Ural Cossack Regiment, who has twice been wounded while leading her men. She is called our 'Russian Joan of Arc.' But there is a courage as great as leading troops to battle. This valor, it seems to me, you showed in remaining to the last at the ancient fortress of Grovno to care for a great soldier who was not even your countryman. In my own name and in the name of my country, I wish to thank you for your service to General Alexis."

Then Barbara observed Mildred flush a beautiful, warm crimson, and stammer something in response. Almost immediately after they were again standing outside in the big antechamber.

Afterwards General Alexis and Lieutenant Orlaff and several of the palace servants showed the three girls over certain portions of the palace that could be exhibited to visitors. On the desk in the hall was an ikon, carefully preserved under glass, which was said to have been painted by St. Luke.

However, in spite of their honors, as soon as possible the three girls were glad to return to their lodgings. Yet Mildred promised that they would allow General Alexis to send his sleigh to them the following day. The great general looked haggard and worn, but appeared to be quickly recovering his strength. Indeed, Barbara afterwards assured Mildred that she considered him extremely good looking and not half so old as she had supposed.

[Back to contents](#)

CHAPTER XVI

The Unexpected Happens

ONE afternoon a short time after the visit to the Winter Palace, General Alexis and Lieutenant Orloff came to the girls' lodgings to have a drive in the sleigh with them.

It was a cold, brilliant afternoon, and they were to undertake a more interesting excursion than usual. Nevertheless, Barbara Meade refused to go.

There were letters which she must write, she pleaded. However, this was not Barbara's real reason: that fact she kept in her own head. Both Mildred and Nona she assisted to get ready, insisting that they both dress as warmly as possible, no matter how stuffy they might feel before starting.

"You are both blondes and a blonde is never so homely as when she is cold," she added sententiously, "for her face is much more apt to get blue than red, except the end of her nose."

Mildred had purchased a lovely fur hat to match her sable coat. And in spite of her poverty Nona had been unable to resist a set of black fox. Furs

were so much cheaper in Russia than in the United States that it really almost seemed one's duty to buy them.

When General Alexis' sleigh arrived, Barbara would not even go downstairs to see the others start. But she managed by pressing her nose against the window to observe that the arrangements for the drive were satisfactory.

The sleigh was a beautiful one, built of mahogany, and the pair of horses wore real silver mountings on their harness.

A driver, in the Imperial livery, sat upon the front seat with a man beside him, who acted as a private guard for General Alexis, although he wore citizen's clothes. There was far less danger of anarchy in Russia during war times; nevertheless, men in public positions in Russia were always watchful of trouble from fanatics.

Therefore, General Alexis and Mildred were together in the middle seat, while Nona and Lieutenant Orlaff occupied the one back of them.

Then the sleigh started off so quickly that it had disappeared before Barbara realized it. Afterwards, with feminine inconsistency, she turned back into their small sitting room, frowning and sighing.

"I do wish I had gone along, after all. There wasn't any place for me, except to sit either between Mildred and General Alexis, or Nona and her Russian lieutenant. Then nobody would have had a good time. Still, perhaps I should have stuck close to Mildred; she is almost my sister. And though Mrs. Thornton might be pleased, Judge Thornton and Dick would be wretched. Russia is so far away and so cold."

Then Barbara made no further explanation, even to herself, of her enigmatic state of mind, but fell to writing letters as she had planned. Some thought she devoted to what she should write Dick about his sister's friend, the distinguished Russian general. But whatever she planned sounded either too pointed or else had no point at all. So she merely closed her letter by explaining that the others had gone for a ride and that General Alexis appeared extremely grateful to Mildred for her care of him in his illness. She also mentioned that she personally liked the distinguished soldier very much and that he was not nearly so foreign as one might expect.

This was not a sensible statement, for General Alexis could scarcely have been more of a Russian than he was. A foreigner, of course, simply is an individual who belongs to another country than one's own. Presumably an American is equally a foreigner to a European. What Barbara actually meant was that General Alexis was not unlike the men to whom she had been accustomed in the United States. He had the courtesy and quiet dignity of the most distinguished of her own countrymen. There was nothing particularly oriental about him or his attitude to women. The truth is that Barbara did not appreciate the fact that General Alexis was too cosmopolitan to show many of the peculiarities of his race. He had seen too much of the world and studied and thought too deeply. Besides, he was a man of real gentleness and simplicity.

As Mildred rode beside him, she too was wondering why she felt so at ease with so great a person. Why, at home, in New York society, she had always been awkward and tongue-tied with the most ordinary young man worthy of no thought. Now she was telling General Alexis the entire story of Sonya Valesky as she might have told it to her own father. And she felt equally sure of his sympathy and understanding. General Alexis would, of course, have no political sympathy with Sonya's ideas. He was a soldier

devoted to his Czar and his country, while in his opinion Sonya could only be regarded as mistaken and dangerous. But Mildred knew that he would be sorry for Sonya, the woman, and sorry for them as her friends.

So she described their original meeting on board the “Philadelphia,” and the suspicion, then wrongfully directed against Sonya, who was at that time using the name of Lady Dorian. Afterwards she told of Sonya’s appearance at the Sacred Heart Hospital and her work there. Last of all, of their unexpected coming together in Russia and of the peculiar bond between Nona Davis and the Russian woman.

At the beginning of her conversation with General Alexis, Mildred had no idea in mind, except to tell the story that had been weighing heavily upon her since Nona’s confidence. Ever since she had seen the picture of Sonya, as Nona had last seen her, the beautiful woman with her too-soon white hair and the haunting beauty of her tragic blue eyes. She, a woman of rare refinement and not yet forty, to spend the rest of her life working among the convicts in Siberia. It was as if she were buried alive!

Suddenly it occurred to Mildred that she might ask the advice of General Alexis. She did not believe it possible that anything could be done for Sonya Valesky now, after her sentence had been passed. But still it would be well to feel they had tried all that was possible.

“You don’t think, General, that there is anything that could be done to have Sonya Valesky pardoned, do you?” she inquired, with unconscious wistfulness. “You see, my friend, Nona Davis, wants so much to take Madame Valesky back to the United States with her. Then neither she nor her ideas would be of any more danger to Russia. Nona says Madame Valesky is much broken by her illness and confinement. She had a terrible

attack of fever only a short time before. Probably she won't live very long, if she is taken to Siberia."

Then, to hide her tears from her companion, Mildred turned her head aside. General Alexis seemed to be staring at her very steadfastly. But fortunately the beauty of the landscape surrounding them gave her an excuse for the movement.

They had crossed the Nicholas bridge and were driving out among the parks and estates that cover the small islands, set like jewels among the white fastness of the river Neva. Here and there the river was solid ice, in other places the thin ice was decorated with a light coating of snow.

The handsome private homes of Petrograd are situated in these island suburbs. Beautiful trees and lawns come down to the water's edge. But today they too were snow sprinkled and most of the homes were closed.

Mildred attempted to pretend that her attention had been attracted by one of these houses, built like a glorified Swiss chalet.

But General Alexis continued to gaze at the side of her cheek and Mildred was painfully conscious that the tears might at any moment slide out of her eyes.

"You care very much about this woman, this Sonya Valesky, Miss Thornton?" General Alexis inquired. "You say that she is a friend of yours and that it will bring you great distress if she must suffer the penalty of her mistakes? I do not wish you to leave Russia in unhappiness."

Mildred slowly shook her head. Had she been almost any other girl, she would have seen nothing to deny in her companion's last speech. But

Mildred had the spirit of entire truthfulness that belongs to only a few natures.

“No, I cannot say that Madame Valesky is exactly *my* friend,” she answered slowly. “I do not know her very well, but I think I should care for her a great deal if we could know each other better. Perhaps she was altogether wrong; anyhow, I do not think she should have attempted to persuade the Russians not to fight for their country at a time like this. Yet when one has seen the horrible, the almost useless suffering that I have seen in these few years I have been acting as a Red Cross nurse, well, one can hardly condemn a human being who believes in peace. Still, Madame Valesky is in reality more Nona’s friend than mine.”

Pausing abruptly, Mildred again turned her face to look at the soldier beside her. She had been tactless as usual in thus expressing her feelings about peace to a man who was a great warrior. But General Alexis did not appear angry. Indeed, there was no disagreement in the expression of his eyes, it was almost as if he too felt as Mildred did. Besides, his next words were:

“I too appreciate what you feel, Miss Thornton, and I too am sorry for this Sonya Valesky. War is a great, a terrible evil, and there was never a time when the world so realized it as it does now. It is my hourly prayer that, after this vast bloodshed, war shall vanish from the face of the earth. But this will not happen if we give up the fight while we are in the thick of it. So Madame Valesky was wrong, so wrong that I might think she deserved her fate, if I did not feel her more mistaken than wicked.”

General Alexis paused and his face grew suddenly lined and thoughtful, as Mildred had seen it in those days at Grovno. Of what he was thinking the

girl did not dream, but neither would she wish to have intruded upon his train of thought.

So she sat quite still with her hands folded under the heavy fur rug and her gray-blue eyes fastened on the snow-covered landscape. Mildred had grown handsomer since her coming to Europe. She would never be beautiful in the ordinary acceptance of the term. But she was the type of girl who becomes handsomer as she grows older, when character which makes the real beauty of a woman's face had a chance to reveal itself. Already a great deal of her awkwardness and angularity had disappeared with the self-confidence, or rather more the self-forgetfulness which her work had given her. Her eyes had a deeper, less unsatisfied expression and her always handsome mouth more humor. For her own experiences and the friendship with the three other American Red Cross nurses had taught her to see many things in truer proportion.

"Miss Thornton," Mildred's attention was again aroused by her companion, "I want to tell you something, but I want you to promise me you will not have too much hope in consequence. I have been thinking of this Sonya Valesky. I believe I can remember her father, or if not her father himself, at least I knew him by reputation. He did not share his daughter's views, but was the faithful servant of the present Czar's father. Moreover, the Czar is my friend, so I mean to tell him the story of Sonya Valesky and see if he will pardon her. She must, of course, leave Russia, perhaps never to return."

General Alexis had been in a measure thinking aloud. But now Mildred's sudden exclamation of happiness made his eyes soften into a look of kindness that again reminded the girl of her father.

“But, my child, you must not hope too much,” he remonstrated. “The Czar may not feel as I do about your friend. After your service to me there is little you could desire which I would not wish to give you.”

One would never have thought of General Alexis as a great soldier at this moment. The heavy lines of his face had gone. There was no sternness about his mouth. His eyes, which were so surprisingly blue because of his other dark coloring, gazed at Mildred’s until for an instant she dropped the lids over her own, feeling embarrassed without exactly knowing why.

The next moment she looked directly at the man, whom she felt sure was her friend, in spite of the differences in their ages, their rank and their countries.

“General Alexis, I am going to ask you to do me a favor—no, I don’t mean about Sonya this time. I shall be more grateful than I can even try to say for that kindness. But this is something which does not concern anyone except just you and me. Will you never in the future speak or think of the service which you are good enough to say I have rendered you.” Actually, Mildred was now twisting her hands together in the old nervous fashion which she thought she had overcome. “It is difficult for me to say things,” she went on, “but I want you to know that the greatest honor I shall ever have in my life was the privilege of nursing you. If I did help make you well, why I am so happy and proud the favor is on my side and not yours.” And Mildred ended with a slight gasp, feeling her cheeks burning in spite of the cold, so unaccustomed was she to making long speeches or to revealing her emotions.

“Miss Thornton,” General Alexis returned. Then instead of finishing his sentence he leaned over and touched his coachman.

“Stop the sleigh for a moment. We are growing cold. It will be better for us to walk for ten or fifteen minutes and then come back to the sleigh.” Again he spoke to Mildred.

“You will come with me for a little?” he asked. “It will be wiser for you not to grow stiff with sitting still.” Afterwards he said something to Lieutenant Orlaff, to which he and Nona agreed.

Five minutes later Mildred was walking across the snow toward the river, with her hand resting on General Alexis’ arm. She was colder than she had imagined and it was difficult to walk over the icy and unfamiliar ground.

But suddenly she stopped and gave an exclamation of surprise and delight which was almost one of awe.

She and General Alexis were alone. Nona and Lieutenant Orlaff had walked off in an opposite direction. But Mildred now beheld the sun setting upon the Russian capital. Beneath, the world was pure white, and above, the sky a glory of orange and purple and rose. Between the two, suspended like giant fairy balls, were the great domes of Petrograd’s many churches.

“I shall never, never forget that picture so long as I live. It will stay with me as my vision of Petrograd long after I have gone home to my own country,” Mildred said simply. Then she stopped in her walk and held out her hand. “Thank you for this afternoon.”

General Alexis did not release the girl’s hand. Instead he lifted it to his lips and kissed it, although the hand was covered with a heavy glove.

Then he smiled at Mildred almost boyishly. “I want to say something to you, Miss Thornton, which I suppose a woman does not really mind hearing, no matter to what country she belongs or what her answer may be. In these weeks I have known you I have come to care for you very deeply. I am old enough perhaps to be your father. I have said this to myself a hundred times and that it ought to make my feeling impossible. It has not. Naturally I understand that my age may make it impossible for you to return my affection, but it has not made the difference with me. I love you, Mildred. I have known many women, but have never met one so fine and sweet as you. It is the custom of your country when a man cares for a woman to tell her so, is it not, or perhaps I should have written first to your father?”

General Alexis’ manner was so naïve, almost as if he had been a boy instead of one of the most distinguished men in Europe. Mildred could almost have smiled if she had not been so overwhelmed by his speech.

Was General Alexis actually saying that he was in love with her? No one had ever proposed to her in her life and she had never expected that any one would care sufficiently. But that the words should come from the man whom she felt to be a genius and a hero! No wonder Mildred was speechless for a moment.

“General Alexis, I have never dreamed of anything like this. I only hoped at the most that you were my friend,” she answered a little later. “Really, I don’t know—I can’t say how I feel. I appreciate the honor, but Russia is so far away, and my father——”

“Yes, I know,” General Alexis interrupted. “Do you not suppose I have thought over all those things? Until this war is past I shall not even ask you to become my wife. My life belongs to my country and I would not have

you alone here in a foreign land. All I ask is that I may write you and some day in happier times may I come to see my American friend?"

Mildred could only nod and let General Alexis keep tight hold of her hand, while a sense of the warmth and sweetness of the affection of a big nature slowly enveloped her.

Then, as they walked back to the sleigh in silence and continued in silence almost all the way back to the lodgings, Mildred could only keep thinking how much her father would like General Alexis. Once she smiled, because her next thought was how immensely pleased and impressed her mother would be. It seemed impossible that the plain and unattractive Mildred could have captured so distinguished an admirer.

Late that night, as she lay awake, Nona Davis' voice suddenly broke the stillness. The two girls were in the single bedroom, Barbara occupying a lounge in the sitting room.

"There is something I want to tell you, Mildred. The strangest thing happened to me this afternoon. Lieutenant Orlaff proposed to me. Why, I scarcely know him at all, but he says that is not necessary when a foreigner meets an American girl," Nona confided.

"You—why, Nona!" Mildred faltered, too surprised for the moment to answer intelligently, because her friend's speech so oddly fitted into her own thoughts. "Did you accept him?"

It was dark in the room, and yet Mildred could see that Nona had risen half way up in bed.

“My gracious, no!” she ejaculated. “In the first place, I don’t care for him at all, and in the second, I just want to get hold of my dear Sonya and return home to the United States. If your general does have her pardoned I shall say prayers for him every night of my life. Funny, but I believe I am afraid of Russia, even though I am half Russian. Still, my mother did prefer to come to America to live. I simply couldn’t bear living in Russia always, could you, Mildred?” Nona ended, as she again dropped back on her pillow.

But Mildred only answered, “I don’t know,” which was not in the least conclusive.

[Back to contents](#)

CHAPTER XVII

The Departure

FOUR days later the three American girls left Petrograd. This was sooner than they had expected to leave, but a desirable opportunity arose for them to get safely across the continent and into France.

The journey was a long and tiresome one, as they had to cross the northern countries of Finland, Sweden and Norway until finally they were able to reach Holland, and thence journey to England and France. But it was not possible to make the trip in any other way, since all of southern Europe was engaged in active fighting.

However, the Red Cross girls did not travel alone. Sonya Valesky went with them. At General Alexis' request the Czar had pardoned her, but she was an exile from Russia forever, never to return at any future time.

Fortunately for the imprisoned woman, her reprieve had come before her sentence had time to be carried out. She was brought directly from the prison, where Nona had once visited her, to the lodgings where the American girls were making ready to depart.

If Sonya regretted the terms of her pardon, she showed no signs of sorrow. But she was strangely quiet then and during the long, cold trip across the continent. In a measure she seemed to have been crushed by the weeks of solitary confinement in the Russian jail with the prospect of Siberia ever before her. Often she would sit for hours with her hands crossed in her lap and her eyes staring out the window, without seeming to see anything in the landscape. One could scarcely imagine her as a woman who had devoted her life to traveling from one land to another, trying to persuade men and women to believe in universal peace.

Yet she was sincerely grateful and appreciative of any attention of affection from the three American girls who were her companions. And after a short time Barbara and Mildred were almost as completely under the spell of this grave woman's charm, as Nona had grown to be. Moreover, the girls felt that she had not yet recovered from her illness, because of the hardships following it. After a few weeks or months in the beloved "Farmhouse with the Blue Front Door" perhaps she would become more cheerful.

For it was toward the chateau country of France that the three American girls were again traveling. The little house where they had once lived for a winter had been Captain Castaigne's wedding gift to Eugenia. Since Eugenia was away nursing in a hospital she had offered her home to her friends. Madame Castaigne had also insisted that they come to her at the chateau; nevertheless, the girls had chosen the farmhouse.

The Countess was no longer young, and still had no servants save old François. The work of entertaining four guests, and one of them a stranger, would have put too great a tax upon her. Moreover, Eugenia would undoubtedly come back for a while to be with her friends and would

naturally stay with her mother-in-law. The girls also hoped that Captain Castaigne might be spared for a short leave of absence. However, in order that the Countess Amélie should not be wounded, or feel that the girls no longer cared to be with her, Barbara had written to say that she would stay at the chateau whenever the Countess wished her society.

Certainly the trip from Russia into France during war times was a difficult one. The girls believed that they could not have made it, except that now and then they stopped for a day or more to rest. On these days Barbara and Nona used to spend at least a few hours in sightseeing, no matter what their fatigue. Now and then Mildred would go with them, but never Sonya. Occasionally Nona would urge her, saying that the exercise and change of atmosphere would be good for her. But Sonya used always to plead fatigue or a lack of interest. Finally she confessed frankly that she had seen most of these cities and countries before, and in some of them was fairly well known. Therefore it might be safer and happier for all of them if she remained quietly in whatever hotel they happened to be staying.

Yet Sonya appeared almost as anxious as her three companions to reach France and the "Farmhouse with the Blue Front Door." This, of course, was because the three girls had talked of it so continuously and the longed for meeting with Eugenia again. For somehow, although the farmhouse was in a war-stained country, its name suggested quiet and a brooding peace.

Nevertheless, several times, after mentioning Eugenia's name, Nona had observed Sonya's face flush and the expression of her eyes become almost apologetic. At first she was unable to understand this and then she remembered.

In the early days Eugenia had not liked their friendship with the woman who was then calling herself Lady Dorian. Indeed, in Eugenia fashion she

had frankly stated this fact to the older woman. Now how much less might she care for their intimacy with the exiled Russian. Yet Sonya was going as an uninvited guest to Eugenia's home.

There had been no time to ask permission. It was true Barbara had written the entire story to Eugenia as soon as Sonya Valesky was released from prison. But one could not tell whether the letter would reach France as soon as the four travelers.

Nona felt that she would have given a great deal to have assured Sonya of Eugenia's welcome, but she was nervous over the situation herself.

Of course, Eugenia would be kind to the exiled woman and offer her hospitality and care. But Eugenia had rigid views of life and was not given to concealing them. It was more than possible that she might let Sonya know of her disapproval. Moreover, she might object to Nona's own championship of Sonya and to her purpose to return with her to the United States and there make their future home together.

Of course, no views of Eugenia's would interfere with this intention of Nona's. But the younger girl would be sorry of Eugenia's disapproval, since she too had learned to have the greatest affection and admiration for the oldest of the four American Red Cross girls. However, there was nothing to do except to wait and meet the situation when the time came.

Actually it was a month between the day of leaving Petrograd and the day when the four travelers arrived in southern France in the neighborhood of the Chateau d'Amélie. But this was because the girls and Sonya had spent some little time in London before attempting to cross the channel.

London was a delightful experience for the three American Red Cross girls. In some fashion the story of their varied service to the Allied cause had reached the London newspapers. For several days there were columns devoted to their praise. Later, invitations poured in upon them from every direction. Mildred was most conspicuous, since the story of her presentation by the Czar with the Cross of St. George was copied from the Russian newspapers into the English, and must have ultimately reached the United States press.

But the girls were not thinking of themselves or their work. They simply gave themselves up to the pleasure of meeting delightful English people and being entertained by them. Sonya would not go about with them, but appeared stronger and more content, so there was no point in worrying over her.

One of the English women, who was again gracious to the three American girls, was the Countess of Sussex, at whose home they had spent a week-end on their first arrival in England several years before. Once more she invited them to her country home, but this time it was impossible for the girls to accept her invitation. However, Nona recalled her meeting in the old rose garden near the gardener's cottage with Lieutenant Robert Hume. She also thought of Lieutenant Hume's last letter telling her that he had been sent back to England as an exchanged prisoner because of his health. But when Nona inquired for the young English lieutenant, the Countess' expression checked further curiosity.

Suddenly she appeared very unhappy and distressed.

"Robert is not in England," she said hastily. "He has been sent away to try to recover, but we do not dare hope too much."

At the moment Nona did not feel that she had the courage to ask where the young man had gone nor from what he was trying to recover.

Actually it was one afternoon in late February, when the three Red Cross girls and Sonya came at last to the village of Le Pretre, near the forest of the same name.

There they found old François awaiting them in a carriage that must have belonged to the Second Empire. It was toward twilight and on a February afternoon, yet after the cold of the northern countries where the girls had been for the past winter, the atmosphere had the appeal of spring. It was not warm, yet there was a gentleness in the air and a suggestion of green on the bare branches of the trees.

François drove them in state to the little “Farmhouse with the Blue Front Door.” But this afternoon the door was standing open and on the threshold was Madame, the Countess, with both white hands extended in welcome.

She wore the same black dress and the same point of lace over her white hair. And by her side stood Monsieur Le Duc, more solemn and splendid than ever and as gravely welcoming of his guests as the Countess herself.

Madame explained that Eugenia had been unable to leave the hospital to be at home to greet her friends, but hoped to see them in a few days. In the meantime they were to feel more than welcome in the farmhouse and in the old chateau, when they cared to come to her there.

Then the Countess said good-by and allowed François to take her home. She knew that her guests were weary and her courtesy was too perfect to permit herself the privilege of a longer conversation, no matter how much she might be yearning for companionship.

The little house itself was warm and light with welcome. There was a fire in the living room and the four beds upstairs smelled of lavender and roses.

The girls took their old rooms, except that Sonya was allotted the bedroom that had once been Eugenia's.

[Back to contents](#)

CHAPTER XVIII

A Poem and a Conversation

NOT the next day, but the one following, Barbara and Mildred walked over to the old chateau together.

Nona did not go with them, as Sonya did not appear to be well and she did not wish to leave her. So she sent a message of explanation to the Countess Amélie, saying that she hoped to be able to call upon her very soon.

It chanced that Sonya did not know of Nona's decision. She was lying down when the girls went away and believed she had the little house to herself. Really she was not ill, only tired and perhaps happier than she had been in a long time. It is true that she had confessed herself defeated and that there was no longer any illusion in her own mind. Perhaps so long as she lived, war and not peace would flourish upon the earth. But the world learns its lessons in strange and dreadful ways and perchance peace might be born in the end from the horror and waste of bloodshed.

By and by, when she felt more rested, Sonya got up and went down into the old dining room of the farmhouse, which the girls had made into their

living room. There was a possibility that the fire might be dying out and it would be wise to replenish it.

To her surprise Sonya discovered Nona curled up in a chair by the window, reading.

The older woman no longer wore black; it had become too depressing in a continent where more than half of the women were in mourning. She had on a simple frock of a curious Russian blue, made almost like a monk's cowl, with a heavy blue cord knotted about her waist.

Nona stared at her friend for a moment in silence. It was curious that whatever costume Sonya Valesky wore seemed to have been created for her. Nona recalled the beauty of her clothes in their first meeting on shipboard, yet they held no greater distinction than this simple dress. Well, perhaps personality is the strongest force in the world and Sonya Valesky's distinction, whatever her mistakes, lay in this.

She now walked across the room and put a few of Francois' precious pine logs on the fire.

At this Nona stirred. "Don't trouble to do that, Sonya; I meant to in another minute. I thought you were ill upstairs."

Sonya shook her head. "I am not in the least ill and you are please to stop worrying about me, Nona. I thought you had gone with your friends to the chateau. What has kept you at home?"

The younger girl answered vaguely, not caring to confess her real motive, since her companion would have been distressed by it.

“If you are all right, Sonya, suppose you stay down here in the living room with me. I have just found a wonderful poem in an American magazine which I meant to save to read to you. Somehow I think it may comfort you. For it shows that there is a big design in this old universe, which works itself out somehow, in spite of all the tragedies and failures of human beings.”

In a big chair in the half shadow Sonya sat down, folding her hands together loosely in her lap. It was a fashion which had come to be almost a habit with her recently. Curious that it should express a kind of resignation!

Nona began reading at once. “The poem is called ‘At the Last’ and is by George Sterling, a Californian, I believe.

“Now steel-hoofed War is loosened on the world,
With rapine and destruction, as the smoke
From ashen farm and city soils the sky.
Earth reeks. The camp is where the vineyard was.
The flocks are gone. The rains are on the hearth,
And trampled Europe knows the winter near.
Orchards go down. Home and cathedral fall
In ruin, and the blackened provinces
Reach on to drear horizons. Soon the snow
Shall cover all, and soon be stained with red,
A quagmire and a shambles, and ere long
Shall cold and hunger dice for helpless lives.
So man gone mad, despoils the gentle earth
And wages war on beauty and on good.

“And yet I know how brief the reign shall be
Of Desolation. But a little while,
And time shall heal the desecrated lands,
The quenchless fire of life shall take its own,
The waters of renewal spring again.
Quiet shall come, a flood of verdure clothe
The fields misused. The vine and tree once more
Shall bloom beside the trench, and humble roofs
Cover again the cradle and the bed.
Yea! Life shall have her way with us, until
The past is dim with legend, and the days
That now in nightmare brood upon the world
Shall fold themselves in purples of romance,
The peace shall come, so sure as ripples end

And crystalline tranquillity returns
Above a pebble cast into a pool.”

When Nona had finished neither she nor her companion made any comment for a moment.

Yet when the girl looked across at the older woman for her opinion, she discovered that Sonya’s cheeks had flushed and that her eyes were shining.

“Thank you, Nona; I shall not forget that,” she then said, repeating to herself, “‘The peace shall come, so sure as ripples end.’ I suppose the trouble is we have not faith and patience enough to believe that love and peace must triumph before God’s plan can be worked out.”

Then Sonya got up. “Come, Nona,” she suggested. “Don’t you think it would be more agreeable to take a walk. It is really a lovely afternoon and I’ve some things I wish to talk to you about. Besides, I want to see the woods you girls have told me of.”

It was delicious outdoors and Nona and Sonya both forgot their serious mood of a little while before. One could not be always serious even in war times in so lovely a land as southern France. No wonder the French nation is gay; it is their method of showing their gratitude for the country that gave them birth.

Finally the woman and girl reached the pool in the woods which Nona had once named “the pool of Melisande,” and Eugenia had afterwards called “the pool of truth.” However, since in Maeterlinck’s play Melisande was seeking the light in the depth of the water, perhaps after all the two titles had almost a similar meaning.

Anyhow, by the pool Sonya chose to make a confession.

“Do you remember, Nona, once long ago, or perhaps it just seems a long time to me, you and I met a Colonel Dalton, an officer in the British army whom I had known before. I think I promised then to tell you of my previous acquaintance with him. I had almost forgotten.”

Nona slipped her arm through her companion's.

“Don't tell me if you had rather not. We will both have a great deal to learn of each other when we go back to the United States to live together.”

Sonya smiled. “There is no use waiting. I have never even told you, Nona, whether or not I am married. You see, I am often called Madame Valesky in Russia, but that is only a courtesy title. I have never married. The fact is, I once lived in England for some time and was engaged to Colonel Dalton. I think we cared a good deal for each other, but he was a soldier and we did not approve of each other's views of life. So by and by our engagement was broken off, which was probably the best thing for us both.”

“Has Colonel Dalton ever married?” Nona inquired inconsequentially.

Her companion shook her head. “Really, I don't know. Suppose we walk on now to the hut where your little French girl Nicolette once lived.”

When the two friends reached the hut, Nona Davis exclaimed in amazement:

“What on earth has happened? Why, our hut isn't a hut any longer; it is a charming little house with some one living in it. I am going to knock and

see who it can be. French people are so courteous, I am sure they won't mind telling me."

Nona knocked and the next moment the door was opened by a young French woman. For an instant they stared at each other, then kissed in a bewilderingly friendly fashion.

"Why, Nicolette, I can't believe my own eyes!" Nona protested. "What are you doing back here in your own little house, only it is so changed that I would scarcely have recognized it."

Nicolette's dark eyes shone and the vivid color flooded her face.

"I am married," she explained. "You remember Monsieur Renay, whom Mademoiselle Barbara named 'Monsieur Bébé?' Well," Nicolette laughed bewitchingly, "he is my husband."

"And is he——" Nona asked and hesitated.

Nicolette shook her head. "He can tell the light from the darkness, and now and then can see me moving in the shadow. Some day, the doctors say, his sight may be fully restored. He has seen the best specialists. Madame Eugenié sent us both to Paris. She it was who made us a home here in the woods out of the old hut, so that my husband might have the fresh air and grow strong to aid his recovery."

"Madame Eugenié," it was a pretty title and one that Eugenia would probably always have in this French country, which had so long known the old Countess as Madame Castaigne.

When Barbara and Mildred returned from the chateau Nona sincerely hoped they would bring news of Eugenia's arrival, since she was growing

more than anxious to see her again.

[Back to contents](#)

CHAPTER XIX

The Reunion

IN truth, Barbara and Mildred were having a delightful afternoon at the Chateau d'Amélie.

When they arrived, solemnly François invited them into the old French drawing room they so well remembered.

But here, instead of the slender, tiny figure of the old Countess appearing to greet them, a tall, dark young woman came forward, whose hair was wound about her head like a coronet.

“Eugenia!” Barbara exclaimed, and straightway shed several tears, while Eugenia and Mildred laughed at her.

Then the three girls went over and sat down on the same Louis XIV sofa that two of them had once occupied with young Captain Castaigne, on their first visit to the chateau.

This time Eugenia took the place of honor in the center, while each hand clasped one of her companions.

“Henri and I arrived just an hour ago,” she explained. “He found he could get a three days leave to come with me. Of course, I wished to rush off to the farmhouse before I even got my traveling things off. But since I am a much managed woman these days, I was made to wait until you came here. I have been expecting you every minute. Now tell me about Nona and Madame Valesky.”

This time it was Barbara who laughed. The idea of Eugenia’s being managed instead of managing other people was amusing. Besides, it was unlike her to talk so fast and ask so many questions without giving one time to reply.

So Barbara only held closer to her friend’s hand and looked at her, leaving Mildred the opportunity for answering.

It was still early in the afternoon and the sunshine flooded the beautiful drawing room. It was strange to see how at home Eugenia seemed to look and feel in it, when a little more than a year before she and the old room had been so antagonistic.

Eugenia had changed. In the first place, she wore this afternoon a lovely costume of violet crepe, trimmed in old gold brocade. It was a costume that must have been specially designed for Eugenia, so perfectly did it suit her rather stately beauty and dark, clear coloring. This turned out to be true, since Eugenia a short time before had discovered a little French dressmaker, whom the war had rendered penniless, and given her work to do.

Now, even while Mildred was talking of Nona and Sonya, the drawing room door opened and Captain Castaigne and his mother came in.

Monsieur Le Duc accompanied them, but promptly deserted his former master and mistress and padded over to Eugenia, placing his great silver head on her lap and gazing at her with adoration.

Captain Castaigne and his mother followed to greet their guests. In his hand the young officer carried a number of letters which he gave at once to Barbara and Mildred.

“These just arrived at the chateau for you; they are American letters and so I am sure you will be pleased.”

Mildred’s were from her mother and father and Barbara had received three from Dick in this same mail, and another which looked as if it might be the long-expected letter from Mrs. Thornton.

After ten minutes of conversation, it was Captain Castaigne who proposed that their guests might be allowed to read their letters without waiting to return home. It was not difficult to guess at their impatience, since it must have been a long time since they had heard from home.

Then he and Eugenia crossed over to the other side of the room and stood by the fireplace. Le Duc went with them and Eugenia kept one hand on the dog’s head.

Now and then she smiled over something Captain Castaigne said to her, then again she looked at him with the anxious gravity that was a part of Eugenia’s character. The war had made the young French officer older, love and marriage had apparently taken ten years from Eugenia’s age. Plainly a beautiful understanding existed between the husband and wife, in spite of the differences in their natures, which would survive to the end.

For when Captain Castaigne suddenly lifted his wife's hand and kissed it, it was like Eugenia to blush and whisper a protest, at which the young officer only laughed.

Over by the window Barbara and Mildred were really too busy with their letters to notice what was taking place. Madame Castaigne had gone out of the room for the instant to speak to François.

Of course, Barbara had read Dick's letters first. She could only read them hastily, for Dick had written to say that he had a fine position with a big real estate office in New York City, and enough salary for two persons to live upon, in a tiny apartment on the west side. Barbara was to come home at once, else Dick would probably lose his job by deserting to fetch her. Also the letter from Mrs. Thornton was cheering. Whatever it may have been, something had occurred to change that lady's state of mind. Perhaps it was her anxiety about Mildred in the days when she knew nothing of her daughter's fate except that Mildred had stayed behind at Grovno until the hour of the final surrender of the Russian fort.

For Mrs. Thornton had written to Barbara to say that she would be most happy to welcome her as Dick's wife, and the dearest wish of her heart was to have her two daughters safe at home in New York City as soon as they were able to return.

Mildred's letters were much of the same character, and the two girls had only barely finished them when François appeared bearing coffee and cakes.

Then the little party talked on until nearly dusk.

At last, when Barbara and Mildred felt compelled to leave, Eugenia proposed that she and Captain Castaigne walk over to the farmhouse with

them. She did not feel that she could wait for another day before seeing Nona.

Nona and Sonya had just been in a few moments and taken off their wraps when the others arrived. And Nona need have felt no nervousness over Eugenia's attitude toward Sonya. Many things had happened to broaden Eugenia's point of view since her arrival in Europe to act as a Red Cross nurse. Besides, few persons could fail to feel anything but sympathy and admiration for the beautiful Russian woman, whose life had come so near closing in tragedy.

There was not a great deal of food at the farmhouse, nevertheless Eugenia and Captain Castaigne remained to dinner.

Barbara and Mildred retired to act as cooks, while Eugenia and Sonya fell to talking together, and Nona and Captain Castaigne.

In the course of their talk Nona remembered to inquire for Lieutenant Hume, who was Captain Castaigne's friend. At last she might be able to hear real news of the young British officer.

By good fortune Captain Castaigne had received a letter written by him in the same post that had brought Barbara's and Mildred's letters.

"Lieutenant Hume had gone to the United States and was living at the present time in Florida. He had appeared to have contracted a fatal illness during his imprisonment, but his letter had said he was feeling ever so much better.

"I can't say how glad I am," Captain Castaigne continued. "There was never a braver fellow in the world than Robert Hume. And besides, if he

should happen to die just now, it would be particularly hard on his family. You see, Hume's older brother, the one with the title, has just been killed in the Dardanelles. Robert Hume is Lord Hume now, I believe, and the English think more of titles than we do in Republican France," the French officer concluded.

"But I thought," Nona commented stupidly, "that Lieutenant Hume was a gardener's son and had been educated by friends who were interested in him."

Then Nona stopped, because Captain Castaigne was half smiling and half frowning over her information. Moreover, Nona suddenly remembered that what she was saying was founded partly on information and the rest on her own fancy.

"Lieutenant Hume told me he was the gardener's son," she protested, "or at least he called the gardener's wife 'Mother Susan.'"

Eugenia had suddenly spoken her husband's name and Captain Castaigne had gotten up to go over to her.

However, he stopped long enough to expostulate. "That was an extraordinary idea of yours, Miss Davis. Hume was only talking of his old nurse. His mother died when he was a baby and she brought him up. I have heard him speak of 'Mother Susan' myself. The Countess you visited in Surrey is a cousin of Hume's, I think, and the old nurse and her husband live there. Hume was having Mother Susan nurse him when you met, I expect. Hope you two may see each other some day in the United States and laugh over that impression of yours, Miss Davis," Captain Castaigne concluded, as he walked over to his wife's side.

At midnight Captain Castaigne and Eugenia went back to the chateau, walking hand-in-hand like children through the woods. There was no fighting these days in this particular portion of southern France and in the peace of the night one could almost forget that the world was at war.

“You will miss your friends when they return to their own country, Eugenia,” Captain Castaigne suggested.

Eugenia nodded. “Yes, they will be gone, I believe, in another month. But we will go over ourselves some day, Henri, and perhaps you may learn to care for my country as I do for yours.”

“Yes, and think of the service I shall owe her for the work the American Red Cross has done for France!” the young officer concluded, and in the darkness lifted his cap for a moment.

“Whatever Lafayette did for you in the cause of freedom, your land has now fully repaid.”

THE END

**BOOKS BY MARGARET
VANDERCOOK**

THE RANCH GIRLS SERIES

THE RANCH GIRLS AT RAINBOW LODGE

THE RANCH GIRLS' POT OF GOLD
THE RANCH GIRLS AT BOARDING SCHOOL
THE RANCH GIRLS IN EUROPE
THE RANCH GIRLS AT HOME AGAIN
THE RANCH GIRLS AND THEIR GREAT ADVENTURE

THE RED CROSS GIRLS SERIES

THE RED CROSS GIRLS IN THE BRITISH TRENCHES
THE RED CROSS GIRLS ON THE FRENCH FIRING LINE
THE RED CROSS GIRLS IN BELGIUM
THE RED CROSS GIRLS WITH THE RUSSIAN ARMY
THE RED CROSS GIRLS WITH THE ITALIAN ARMY
THE RED CROSS GIRLS UNDER THE STARS AND STRIPES

STORIES ABOUT CAMP FIRE GIRLS

THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS AT SUNRISE HILL
THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS AMID THE SNOWS
THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD
THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS ACROSS THE SEA
THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS' CAREERS
THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS IN AFTER YEARS
THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS IN THE DESERT
THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS AT THE END OF THE TRAIL



*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE RED CROSS GIRLS WITH THE
RUSSIAN ARMY ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE

THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG™ LICENSE

PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make

the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg

Project Gutenberg is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg's goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541.

Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 41 Watchung Plaza #516, Montclair NJ 07042, USA, +1 (862) 621-9288. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses.

Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate.

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support. Project Gutenberg eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition. Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org. This website includes information about Project Gutenberg, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.